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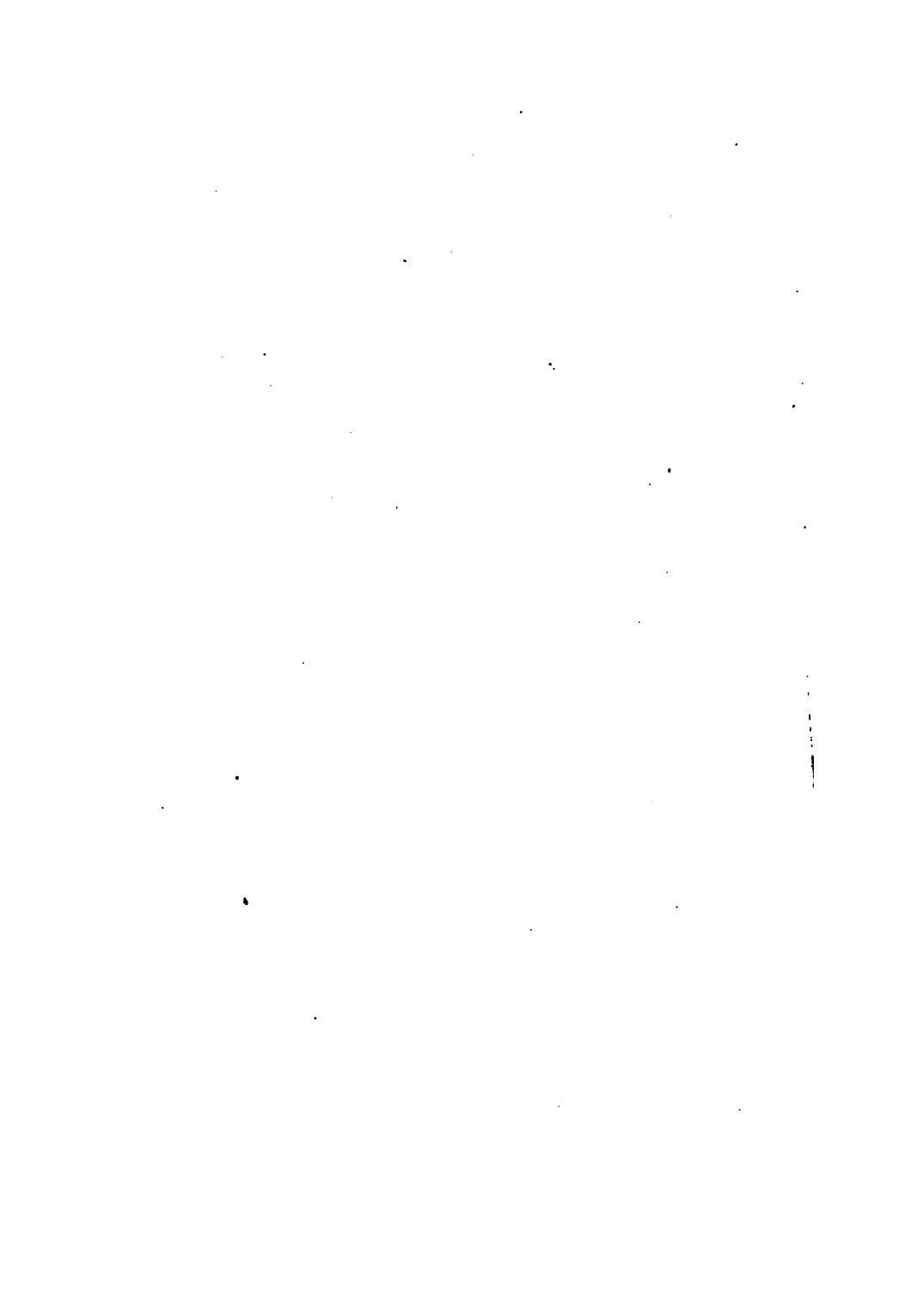
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OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY.

VOL. I.

OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY.

BY

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"VICTOR AND VANQUISHED,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY.

CHAPTER I.

More water glideth by the mill,
Than wots the miller of.

TITUS ANDRONICUS.

A STRETCH of highway lay white and level in the dusk of the September evening, and on its margin stood a low red tavern, whose glory departed with the last stage-coach, and which crumbled to ruin, as slowly, but as surely, as did its grand old neighbour there behind the ivy-weighted walls of Abbotsmoor. For a whole mile this wall extended before it was broken by the iron gates through which a view was gained of the lodges and the sombre avenue; and under this wall, in the September twilight, a travelling-carriage rolled upon the wide, white road.

Within a few yards of the iron gates, the horses were pulled up. The postilion, sitting square upon his saddle, looked straight along the road, as a well-trained post-boy should; the man-servant, seated with folded arms upon the box, had his eyes fixed upon the roadside tavern half a mile ahead; and neither of the men turned his head one inch, when the carriage-door behind them was opened from within. No change upon their faces showed that they even understood why the horses had been stopped.

A gentleman descended leisurely from the chaise, turned and addressed a few low words to some one within, and then closed the carriage-door again quietly. The gentleman stood in the shadow as he gave his order to the servant—stood in the shadow as he paused for a minute to watch the retreating vehicle—and was in the shadow still as he walked up to the gates of Abbotsmoor and tried them. Locked. Four gates there were in all, a high pair in the centre, and a single narrow gate on either side, but all locked.

He stood for a few moments looking round him in the dusk, and then whistled a call. The

summons was answered at once. An old man came limping from the lodge, and scrutinised the visitor suspiciously, as shrewd old men will do when their sight grows dim.

"I heard the call, sir. I'm sharp enough to hear, but my sight fails me, so I can't tell who it is."

"A stranger and a traveller," the gentleman answered from without the gates, as the old man fumbled with the rusty keys, "and anxious, on his way past Abbotsmoor, to see the house."

"It's late for that," the old man muttered, with a feeble effort to turn the key in the lock; "we get but few visitors at any time, but they never come after sunset—and no wonder."

"You've opened this gate a thousand times, I daresay, but I fancy I can do it better. Let me try."

As the stranger spoke, he put one hand through the bars, and turned the key with ease; then he laughed a little at the old man's surprise.

"My ears are sharp to hear the difference in voices," the lodge-keeper said, eyeing this visitor with keenest interest as he entered the park,

"but my eyes won't recognise faces now. Your voice has a homelike tone to me, sir, so I know it's English, though there's a richness in it that reminds me of the foreign countries I used to visit with my old master. And yet—I ought to know the tongue of the Far West when my own father was an American."

"Surely," the visitor said, "you have no need to lock the gate behind us. Who would enter here in the dusk?"

"Who indeed?" questioned the old man, surlily. "No, sir, it was only habit. Such habit clings to a man after ten years of it."

"Ten years," the stranger was pausing within the gates, and looking thoughtfully on among the shadows of the heavy trees, "only ten years. Then you were not here at the time of old Mr. Myddelton's death?"

"Not I, sir—thank Providence for that! I was in Germany at that time, with my own old master. It was only after my eyes and limbs failed me that Mr. Haughton—the family solicitor, and a family connection, sir—put me here to keep the keys. It wasn't a post many cared to fill; it isn't a post many would

care to fill—even half-blind cripples like myself—now that such a dark name rests upon the place.”

“Who lived here at the time of the murder?”

The question was asked coolly, and the questioner's eyes did not come back from their gaze among the shadows.

“The woman who kept the lodge then, sir, died not long after the murder.”

“Then all you know of that time is from hearsay only?”

“From hearsay only, sir. Who would wish to know it any other way?”

“Who indeed?”

The dusk was deepening in the park, and the shadows lay a little weirdly about the waters of the lake. The old man looked with curiosity after the strange gentleman as he sauntered up the avenue, quite slowly as it seemed, yet with a step which was far from purposeless or listless.

“It's a queer hour to come and view the place. Mostly people choose broad daylight when they come to see the spot where old Myddelton was murdered.” So the old man muttered, while the stranger went slowly on

towards the great desolate house, over whose history a veil of gloom and mystery hung.

"It almost seems," this visitor whispered to himself, as he passed up the silent avenue, "as if the mist of guilt upon the place, and this heavy lethargy of isolation and disuse, had wrapped themselves about me since I passed those gates. The horrible paralysis that stayed all life and motion in this spot, has touched me too; or why do I not clearly follow out this plan, as I have followed others in my life? What is this feeling upon me which seems to stop me here at the very spot. 'Not to-night,' it says. Why not to-night? It is but the first link of a chain I have to follow link by link to its end. Can I begin too soon? This inexplicable feeling is—at any rate unworthy of a thought."

As he argued thus with himself, uttering the thought aloud in the evening silence, he raised his hat, and for a few minutes carried it in his hand as he walked on up the neglected, grass-grown avenue. The evening breeze rustled the green branches overhead, and with lazy enjoyment he lifted his face to meet it. It was a dark

grave face, full of determined purpose, yet most striking at that moment was its look of intense patience—not the spurious patience born of listlessness or indifference, but a steadfast, manly patience, born it might have been in a great repentance, or it might have been in a great wrong. It was a face which could wear other expressions, far different from—if not warring against—the quiet, manful power of enduring and forbearing, so plainly written there; but at that moment, raised among the dusky shadows, this was its only look.

The avenue at Abbotsmoor was nearly two miles in length, for though, as the crow flies, it would have been scarcely a mile from the lodge to the great front entrance, yet the approach was so curved and twisted that it doubled the distance. In old times neighbouring squires used to urge on old Mr. Myddelton the advisability of forming a new approach, straight as an arrow, from the lodges to the house; but their advice was laughed at grimly, and the old avenue kept its winding way.

So it happened that the visitor was within a hundred yards of the house itself when he caught

his first glimpse of it. He made no stop in his thoughtful, unhurried walk; but there grew a look of keen intentness in his eyes, and there started into sudden life a line of deep and harassed thought between his brows.


"In spite of the changes," he said to himself, his full gaze on the house, "I shall remember it all more clearly on this spot."

The scene which lay before him was grand even in its utter desolation, and picturesque even in its heavy, haunted gloom; for on neither the empty building nor the untrodden grass lay any trace of that deed which had made this spot a shunned and isolated one.

"In this weird light, and at this lonely hour," the stranger whispered to himself, "I shall see it just as it should be seen."

There were no steps to mount, no terraces to tread. The mansion stood low on the wide, level park, but it was none the less a grand and an imposing structure, viewed from that last point in the irregular avenue.

The visitor trod, more slowly now, across the lawn, up to the wide oak doorway (locked securely against his examining hand), then slowly



on, past the long row of windows belonging to the ground-floor, the shutters of which were so heavily barred. He counted them as he sauntered past the front of the house—eight, between the door and the corner. Involuntarily he stepped back a few paces, and counted the eight upon the other side. As he did so, a sound, indefinite and hardly audible, reached him from the shrubbery beyond the lawn—a sound so faint that it might well have been laid to imagination only, but a sound about which the listener, after a minute's pause, felt no doubt at all.

“A cough,” he said, with lazy sarcasm, “strangled and stifled, but a cough unmistakably; and, more than that, a man's cough, and still more than that, a cough I've heard before.”

Then he sauntered on. The rank grass over which he stepped was heavy with dew, yet often he stopped where it was longest, and stooped to gather a blossom from the wild-flowers which overran the neglected lawn. So he passed from the great front entrance round to the south end of the house, turned and loitered past the servants' premises at the back, then turned another corner and continued his walk—a little more

slowly—beside the shuttered windows on the north side. At one, the last in the row, he made a pause, not as if in uncertainty or doubt, but with a settled purpose. First he examined it critically, measuring with his eye its height and width, and its depth from the ground; then he turned his back upon it, and took in, with a keen, full glance, the scene before it—the stretch of lawn, the bordering of shrubbery beyond, and the crowd of grand old elms towering above it all still farther on. For at least ten long minutes he stood so, his eyes—dark gray eyes, holding the rare beauty of deep, clear thought—earnestly scanning the dusky scene, and an utter stillness and vigilance in the easy attitude.

If any eyes could have been watching from among the over-grown laurels opposite, this was a picture not to be easily either forgotten or understood—so lonely and so still the scene, so easy yet so full of purpose this solitary figure. But why should any watchful eyes have been hidden there among the darkening laurel leaves?

The long, thoughtful minutes were spent at last, and the lonely visitor turned to leave Abbots-

moor. One last glance before he entered the avenue, and the scene was photographed on his mind indelibly. The wide, high frontage of the house; the rows of windows heavy with dust and cobwebs, their shutters closely barred, yet cracked in many places; the wide door, scratched and scarred, while a rank, unmanageable branch of ivy had fallen across it, as if to form another heavy bolt; grass growing in the cracks of the stone steps just as it grew between the embrasures of the windows; wild flowers and garden flowers tangled together among the weeds and grasses; uncut and unnailed creepers, perishing helplessly upon the ground, where they seemed struggling to escape the ill-fated house. All the ravages of wind and weather, all the heavy footprints of time and devastation, all the rank fruit of neglect.

"There is a rookery overhead," said the stranger, as he gazed, "and it is impossible but that *sometimes* the sunshine finds its way here, and the birds sing. It was an English home once, and years hence it may be so again, although old Myddelton's heir——"

A sound again, subdued and hushed almost in

a moment, yet the keen ear had detected it, and the swift, sportsmanlike glance had discovered a figure watching stealthily from among the trees. A few steps on the long tangled grass, and he was beside this figure, looking down upon it with cool, ironical curiosity.


"Are you here on your own account, or are you sent by your employer?"

The man he addressed did not answer. Perhaps that stifled cough was stopping him; but perhaps that quick gasp of his breath was sudden fear.

"This is the second time I have caught you watching me, and I have a fancy for its being the last. A spy can expect only one treatment, and here it is."

His left hand was fast on the man's collar; with his right he broke a branch above his head, and the next thing of which the listener was aware was a particular sensation of smarting and stinging in his shoulders, and a general sensation of smarting and stinging throughout his whole system.

Grinding his teeth with rage and shame, he rose from the spot to which he had ignominious-



ly been hurled, and looked after his chastiser with an ugly scowl upon his smooth, sleek face.

"This sort of thing," he muttered between his teeth, "a man never forgets."

An aphorism few would deny at any time, but one which certainly could not be denied by those who boasted the acquaintance of Bickerton Slimp, confidential clerk in the office of Lawrence Haughton, attorney-at-law in the town of Kinbury.

"I shall be even with him yet!"

Such was the magnanimous conclusion arrived at by Mr. Slimp, before he dragged his injured person down the avenue in the wake of his assaulter.

This assaulter had in the meantime reached the gates, and the old lodge-keeper held one of them open for him while he took a crown from his purse.

"Good night," he said then, genially. "Lock the gate after me, so that you may lock in all other marauders."

The old man chuckled as he turned the rusty key.

"There's only myself, sir, to lock in." And

the words were true, for Bickerton Slimp's modes of ingress and egress had been nobly independent of lock and bolt, and, though they necessitated a creeping progress unsuited to an upright man, they had their advantage in being known only to himself.

* * * * *

The low red tavern—over the door of which, through ruth and revelry, the sign of the “Myddelton Arms” had hung for fifty years—felt that evening just a shade of the importance which, according to its own popular legends, belonged to it in the old coaching days. The arrival of a private travelling carriage, with emblazoned panels and white silk lining, was not by any means of daily occurrence, and made the lazy ostler put down his pipe with such impetus that it broke into half-a-dozen pieces. The entertainment of a lady traveller was still less a circumstance of daily occurrence, and made the fidgety hostess nervously and petulantly remark to herself, as she threw her soiled apron behind the door, “Sure as ever there's nothing in the house, somebody's safe to come!”

“You'll be wishing for tea, ma'am,” she sug-

gested, coming blandly forward a minute afterwards, to forestall any idea of dinner which might have lurked in the traveller's mind, "a wholesome knife-and-fork tea, as we call it? I've as nice a cold ham as ever was boiled; and with some eggs——"

"Thank you," the lady answered, passing through the door which the landlady held open, "anything you have. I am sure it will be nice, as you say."

"Only for one, ma'am?"

The fact was self-evident, and the useless piece of enumeration on the part of the landlady only the effect of habit, but she looked surprised when, with the answer, came a vivid blush.

Tea was served in the shadowy, low-ceiled parlour, where a newly-lighted fire struggled into existence, and added considerably to the shadows, but nothing to the light or cheeriness; when there came the heaviest blow which the landlady of the "Myddelton Arms" had felt for many a day. The cold boiled ham—emphatically the *pièce de résistance* of the inn larder—was gracing that long table in the parlour, and she had displayed there everything edible or


ornamental which the inn could furnish forth, when a gentleman arrived, walked coolly into the inn, and ordered—strange to say—tea for one. No need for the landlady to forestall him with the suggestion. Whether or not it was his habit to dine late, the order for tea came promptly enough from his lips to-night.

“He doesn’t look hurried or even hungry,” thought mine hostess, gazing nervously up into his face; “will it do to ask him to wait? He looks kind, and a gentleman,” was the next nervous thought; “will it do to tell him how I’m situated?”

At that moment the gentleman smiled—smiled almost as if he understood her.

“Perhaps your room is engaged?”

That made it easy. The landlady’s lips were unsealed, and she did tell him exactly—and rather circumstantially—“how she was situated.” As he stood listening, leaning against the window of the little bar, he took a crimson leather purse from his pocket, and held it in his hand. Her eyes fell on it as she spoke, and she noticed that it was old and rather shabby, but that it was a peculiar purse, and handsomer than any she had ever seen before.



"If the lady will allow me to join her at tea, it will save trouble, will it?"

18 So he asked, opening the while one of the pockets of the purse, and drawing a card from it.

"Yes, sir, if, as you say, she will."

Mine hostess made this observation rather absently, gazing at the many pockets of the purse, and trying to read the name which was stamped in gold upon the leather inside the flap.

"On second thoughts, I will not send a card; it can make no difference. Say a stranger asks this favour of her."

As he put back the card a sudden quizzical smile came into his eyes.

"What sort of a lady is she?"

"Well, sir," began the landlady, meditatively, "I should say, if I was asked, that she's an invalid. She looks white enough to have just come from a sick-bed, and she's hardly strength and energy to move about; she doesn't look cheerful either. I should say, ill in mind and body; that's what I should say, sir, if I was asked."

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Perhaps the stranger thought she had been asked, and that he had been answered, for without further words he turned away and walked to and fro within the circumscribed limits of the bar, until mine hostess reappeared with an expression of intense relief on her countenance.

"The lady sends her compliments, sir, and will be very happy if you will join her. I'll take fresh plates and a cup in at once. I'm very glad it's arranged so, as you're in a hurry."

Her mind being thoroughly at ease, and the arrangements propitious, mine hostess could afford to bring out a little of the gracious and accommodating loftiness of the stage-coach period.

The door was hardly closed upon her guest when another customer arrived at the "Myddelton Arms," but this time the landlady felt no nervousness in the prospect of the entertainment, for the face of Mr. Bickerton Slimp was well known in the tavern bar, and the voice of Mr. Slimp had a familiar, even confidential tone when it addressed mine hostess.

"Well, Mrs. Murray, no need to ask you how

you are; you look as blooming as usual. I've snatched a few minutes to call in, you see. Ah, if your snug hostelry was but a little nearer to Kinbury, what constant visits you would have from yours truly!"

"You aren't looking well, Mr. Slimp," remarked the landlady, gazing critically into his face.

"Oh, yes, yes, quite well," he answered, with a movement of his shoulders which he intended for a gesture of deprecation, but which had the appearance of an experiment to test their muscles, "but tired a little. The old man has kept me very hard at it to-day."

"The old man, indeed!" smiled the listener, with a friendly tap upon the narrow shoulder of Mr. Slimp. "Why, Mr. Haughton cannot be more than forty, if he's that. His sister was born the same year as me, that was in '29, and he's younger by two years at the very least. Well, if we were born in '29, and this is '71, aren't we forty-two? And can you call *him* an old man?"

"Ladies are never old," smiled the lawyer's clerk insinuatingly; "but in these degenerate

days, Mrs. Murray, our employers get dubbed old men, without reference to the year in which they chanced to be born."

"When you set up for yourself, then, your clerks will be at liberty to speak of you as an old man, though you can scarcely be—let me see—more than Mr. Haughton's age."

This mine hostess said with a sly relish, for Bickerton Slimp affected a youthful air and youthful garments, and few ventured to remind him of his age. Even she could not have done so without that dainty allusion to his "setting up for himself," the centre of the labyrinth in which he plodded; the bourne to which he fancied craft and cunning were his surest guides.

He smiled again; he had a bland, stereotyped smile, which he considered a mighty weapon with the fair sex.

"Just so; and you shall rebuke my clerks as sternly as you please, on condition that you always smile upon me. Is—dear me, what was I going to say,—oh, is the parlour vacant this evening?"

Mrs. Murray was a little surprised at the

question, and a little surprised that Mr. Slimp still stood on the chilly bricks in the little hall, and did not take his own seat in the bar, and light his pipe. But she was not sorry for an excuse to tell him about those two guests who were drinking tea together now from her best china, and she did so at large. The lawyer's clerk listened smilingly, nor did he attempt to speak himself until the narration was quite over. Then he asked her coaxingly to mix him a glass of whiskey punch, and enumerated the different ingredients he required with a cultivated taste which would have done no discredit to a Yankee.

"Just mix it so, Mrs. Murray, if you please; and do it yourself, to give it its proper flavour. You are quite sure you have Angostura bitters in the house?"

Mrs. Murray stepped within the bar and left the lawyer's clerk still standing beside the parlour door. The mixing of the punch, even with all its requisites, would not take more than two minutes, so he had no time to spare. With a loud, demonstrative carelessness, he opened the parlour door and entered the room, stood a moment transfixed with astonishment when he

found it occupied, uttered a meek and very elaborate apology to the lady for having assumed the room to be empty, and backed from it with slow—very slow—deference.

“I just opened that door to see what time it was,” he explained, as he entered the bar and took up his glass with a beaming smile upon his face; “I knew my watch was wrong, but did not know how much. I cannot depend upon your kitchen clock; but that timepiece upon the parlour chimney I depend upon implicitly, and always did.”

“Were they at tea?” inquired the hostess, her curiosity stronger than her pride.

“Not—exactly.” Mr. Slimp answered the question with unction, but whether this was the effect of the whiskey, or of what he had seen, was not evident. “Not—exactly; they were standing together on the hearth, Mrs. Murray, looking very interesting indeed.”

“Why, they are strangers!”

“Ahem! So we are given to understand, *if we choose*.”

“But”—Mrs. Murray’s very breath was taken away by the covert insinuation—“but you say

they were standing together on the rug. Were they talking or shaking hands, or anything?"

"Not—exactly," Mr. Slimp answered again, as deliberately as before. "In fact they were standing there in utter silence, which is the suspicious part of it all. Do you think that if they were strangers to each other they would stand so, without speaking? No, my good friend; they would have been seated at table, and talking amiably."

Mine hostess put on an air of worldly wisdom equal to Mr. Slimp's, and, not to be behindhand in other qualities, remarked, with more vivacity than veracity, that she had "suspected so all along."

The next moment she had left the bar, for the parlour bell had rung, and she always liked—as she expressed it—to answer her own bells.

"It's for the carriage, Mr. Slimp," she whispered, looking in at the bar on her return. "I must go and tell the servants; they are having supper in the kitchen. I left the girl to see to them."

"Wait, Mrs. Murray," called Slimp, in a subdued, eager voice; "I will go round to the yard

myself, and order the horses to be put to."

It was almost dark in the yard now, and, though it impeded his examination, it certainly afforded Mr. Slimp the opportunity of conducting it unperceived. The ostler of the "Myddelton Arms" was glad to see Mr. Slimp and to converse with him, but the postilion, when he came briskly out and took his seat, and the gentleman's gentleman who stood quietly by until the horses moved and then followed them to the front door of the inn, exhibited a little more surprise at the effort he made to enter into conversation with them, and discouraged those efforts with cool civility.

The carriage lamps were lighted, the horses fresh and restive. The breath of the near horse actually fanned the cheek of Mr. Slimp when he leaned against the house looking on. The lady for whom the beautiful carriage waited came slowly and timidly from the parlour, while the gentleman, who was indebted to her for his accommodation, followed her leisurely. It was natural, of course, that he should see her to her carriage. She bade good evening to the landlady, wrapped her cloak tightly about her, drew a soft

wool veil down over her face, and took her seat. One of her hands was full of flowers, a curious mixture of wild-flowers and of cultivated blossoms run to seed; the other she offered to the gentleman; and he, standing at the carriage door, took it, and quietly wished her good night. After a moment's pause he went back into the inn parlour. Mrs. Murray had performed her last curtsey, and the horses had made a few steps forward, when he came out again, and spoke up to the servant on the box seat, while the postilion drew in his eager horses.

"Your lady left this purse behind her in the tavern."

The servant stooped with a touch of his hat and took the purse; the gentleman stepped back, and the carriage went on its way. But Mrs. Murray had not regained her breath yet. In her officiousness at something having been left behind, she had gone close up to the lamps, and so she saw that the purse he handed to the lady's servant was the purse she had last seen in his hands when he took his card from it, the worn crimson purse, with the many pockets and the name stamped in gold.

"Don't you think that she seems very nervous and delicate, sir?"

Mine hostess made this inquiry merely out of curiosity for his reply; but felt very little enlightened when that was given.

"I do indeed."

For nearly an hour he stayed at the inn, and for this hour Mr. Slimp's life was a burden to him. The cool, half-quizzical eyes of this man who had thrashed him, seemed following him everywhere, for the sole purpose of making him uncomfortable and ill at ease. Once or twice the embryo attorney became so seriously depressed that he resolved to start at once for Kinbury, but he never carried out the resolution. He had a plan to work out with which a sudden departure might have interfered, and, besides that, it might almost have looked like fear—strange and unnatural hypothesis after that scene among the trees at Abbotsmoor!


It was quite an idle hour which the stranger spent at the roadside tavern, but he did not apparently object to wasting it. Wherever he stood or sat; to whomsoever he talked; with whomsoever he laughed; if he did not laugh or

speak at all ; lounging and loitering there with utter indolence, yet with a grace which had no listlessness or supineness in it—he pursued the luckless clerk with this cool, amused gaze of his. It was never angry ; it was far from insolent ; it was only a gaze of quiet amusement. But perhaps the contempt which Mr. Slimp read in it was not all born of his imagination only, though certainly the threat he read there was. The handsome, amused eyes held no threat for such a pitiable object as the man who had cringed and fawned under an upraised arm.

CHAPTER II.

"A girl who has so many wilful ways,
She would have caused Job's patience to forsake him,
Yet is so rich in all that's girlhood's praise,
Did Job himself upon her goodness gaze,
A little better she would surely make him."

THE "Myddelton Arms" stood on the highway about a mile and a half from Kinbury, and at about the same distance on the other side the town, lay the small estate of Deergrove, sheltered at the back by the grove which originally gave it its name, and against which the walls of the house stood out with dazzling whiteness, but unsheltered in the front, where its windows glistened in the noonday sun, unbroken and unrelieved by any waving leaf or blossom, and where the flower-beds, so perfect in their outline, stared thirstily up in summer days, and watched for the cool, coy shadows of the passing clouds.



"But it does not signify much," as one of Mrs. Trent's visitors said to herself, walking slowly up the smooth and well-kept lawn; "they grow no flowers here but those that love the glare."

The summer had passed its middle age, yet the round beds were gay in their scarlet and yellow robes. It was still quite warm and pleasant in the dusk of the September evening, so the young girl sauntered slowly up the drive, thinking how beautiful it would be in the grove behind the house, where the twilight was so dim and silent.

Within the house a man-servant had shut the daylight from one room, and was lighting it—as he had been skilfully trained to do—to show off at their best the snow-white damask, the glittering plate, and, above all, the faces and figures of the ladies of the house. In the drawing-room on the opposite side of the small paved hall the daylight was still allowed to linger.

A moderate-sized and modernly furnished drawing-room, suggestive of ample means and luxurious taste, but with one vague, inexplicable want. This deficiency might not have

been felt by many of those who met here, but, to those who recognised it at all, it was evident in everything the handsome room contained, or rather it was so ever-present there that it made itself felt in spite of all those attributes of ease and luxury, or of art and literature, which this drawing-room at Deergrove held. It peeped from the glistening blue curtains, and lay on the deep white rug. It nestled among the silken cushions, and lingered about the laden tables. It stared back from the vivid, well-framed pictures on the walls, and echoed even from the gleaming keys of the grand piano.

It was only one of the four occupants of the room who, that evening, was conscious of this vague sense of something wanting. If it had been possible for the others to feel it, the void could not have existed.

A group of four, sitting at ease, with very little of the air of expectancy usual to the waiting minutes before dinner. The hostess reclined in a wide easy-chair beside one of the bay windows. She was a large, languid woman, elegantly dressed, but possessing in her handsome face that great want which all her house held.

She had three claims to individuality, and three only—a fine figure, a great ambition, and an overweening pride in her only child. And Mrs. Trent was performing her own peculiar mission as she sat smiling upon her daughter and her guests, and bringing in, at every opportunity, dainty allusions to her titled acquaintances. In the corner of a small couch near her, reclined her daughter Theodora, leaning forward gracefully from the cushions, while her long skirts of green satin lay in rich folds upon the white rug. Her hair, of pale brown, was dressed high upon her head, as was the fashion of that year, and a butterfly of gold and emeralds shone with almost dazzling lustre among the plaits above her temple. Her features were clearly cut and regular, like her mother's; and her eyes were of the same light blue; but her lips were still more haughty in their curves, and even a little colder in their rest. A handsome woman undeniably was Theodora Trent, yet in her faultless features that guest, to whom her face is turned so often, sees that one vague deficiency which is about him always in this house.

Upon the rug, with his elbow on the chimney-

piece, and the fingers of one hand toying with his silky, pale moustache and whiskers, lounged Captain Hervey Trent, nephew of his hostess, and the husband selected for her only daughter—not simply because he was so sure to inherit old Myddelton's money, but because he was in every way suitable for a son-in-law. Handsome and elegant, he graced society, and would add to her daughter's popularity; easy and indolent, he would not be likely to rebel against the will of a mother-in-law.

Decidedly Captain Trent was a handsome man. There never was heard a dissentient voice when that fact was asserted, while no one was more thoroughly aware of its truth than Captain Hervey Trent himself. He was twenty-five—his cousin Theodora's age exactly—and boasted the regular features and blue eyes which characterised the Trents: he stood five feet ten in his boots, and measured the approved number of inches across the shoulders, and, beyond all this, he possessed equally the power, and the time, and the inclination to dress to the very perfection of what he termed "good form." He was

a man with a musical, passionless voice, and white, listless hands; able to bear with no unhandsome grace the burden of himself and the boredom which surrounded him; and to go through life as a gentleman should who rightly understands the exigencies of "good form;" and can utterly ignore so vulgar an abstract idea as emotion.

A great contrast to her nephew, was the one guest whom Mrs. Trent entertained this evening—so great a contrast to them all, indeed, that not for years were they to comprehend the unreachd heights and unsounded depths of a nature such as his. Nineteen women out of twenty would unhesitatingly have pronounced Captain Hervey Trent the handsomer man of the two; not one woman out of twenty could have lavished on Hervey Trent one tithe of the thought, and curiosity, and admiration which were won from them—sometimes even against their will—by Royden Keith.

We have seen him before in the evening dusk at Abbotsmoor. Theodora Trent had seen him before, but his face was still a riddle to her, as

it had been from the first, and as it was still to be. It was a grave face when at rest, with its strange mixture of power and patience—a face full of deep and concentrated thought, but with never a shade of gloom upon it, or trivial fretfulness; a face that could be only brave, and fearless, whether shadowed by that depth of thought, or brightened by the rare smile which Theodora tried to provoke. Its skin was so browned by the sun, the moustache and the short hair were so thick and dark, the lashes so long, and the teeth so white, that many took Royden Keith for a native of Southern Spain or Italy. But that idea vanished after the first few minutes, and most especially when he spoke. Though puzzled a little now and then by the trace of foreign travel, no one could help being struck by what was essentially English in him; the straightforward glance of his eyes, clear-judging and far-seeing, and the voice, which, whether ringing to anger, falling to quiet irony, or softening to pathos, was, despite an accent or an idiom, picked up unconsciously in foreign lands, most thoroughly English.

He was sitting opposite Miss Trent, his elbow

on a table near the couch on which she sat. She looked from him up to Captain Trent, and down to him again. Even her unobservant eyes were puzzled by the difference in the attitudes of the two young men; and she turned for the last time from her cousin's leaning form, and the slow motion of his hands, to the tall, well-knit figure which, though full of strength and activity, was yet capable of an ease and stillness almost remarkable.

"And can you really mean, Mr. Keith," she said, dropping her fingers on a cabinet portrait of herself which lay upon the table beside her, "that you have never been photographed before."

"Why 'before'?" asked Royden, extending his hand for the picture.

"After all, I am rather glad," she mused, smilingly, "because now your first photograph will be taken with us."

"How will that happen, Miss Trent?"

"I will tell you," she answered, watching his face as he examined the portrait. "On the day of our pic-nic at Abbotsmoor, a little French photographer, who lives in Statton, is to be there

with his camera and take us all, with the old mansion for a background. Now you see why I am glad that will be your first portrait."

"Hardly." Mr. Keith said this quietly, as he bent over the picture, and Theodora looked in vain for a smile.

"Interesting scene," remarked Captain Hervey, raising his blue eyes slowly from the rug; "Lady Lawrence requires the picture, I believe; at any rate, she has proposed it through her lawyer. The *dramatis personæ* are to be old Myddelton's relations, and the scene his ruinous estate. An elegant group and cheerful surroundings—eh, Mr. Keith?"

"I do not know all old Mr. Myddelton's relations."

"You know the chief of them, Mr. Keith," Theodora answered, unconscious of the vanity of her words, and of the smile which accompanied them, "and you shall see them all on Thursday at Abbotsmoor. You will not be too proud to be photographed among them, will you?"

"Without being one of the family, ought I to be included in the picture?"

There was an intonation that baffled Theodora, and she looked up uneasily.

"Certainly ; I shall insist."

She said this with her sweetest smile, and a certain manner which many young ladies of the present age affect—a gracious condescension and self-assertion which in the last century it would have taken a middle-aged matron of the highest society to make bearable, but which now is chosen and assumed by many who, while they speak with open contempt of their fast or unformed sisters, fail to see where they themselves have overstepped the lily-bordered path of fresh and simple girlhood.

"One other member of old Myddelton's family you will see here to-night, Mr. Keith," remarked Mrs. Trent, in a tone which seemed to entreat his leniency for the person of whom she spoke ; "she is a niece of mine, and cousin of my daughter's, though she belongs to quite the other side of the house"—on that "quite" Mrs. Trent laid a deliberate emphasis. "We like to ask her here occasionally to show her a little society. She is a grown-up girl now, and not unpresentable ; so I do all I can for her, and

allow her as close an intercourse with my daughter as my daughter chooses to admit."

"Poor little Honor," added "my daughter," with a laugh of particular complaisance. "She is a thorough Craven, as was——"

"A thorough coward?" Royden asked, when she so abruptly paused.

"Oh, Mr. Keith," laughed Theodora, pleasantly, "you know what I mean. At least, you do not know, of course. Why should you be expected to know anything about old Myddelton's family? But this is how it is. Old Mr. Myddelton, you must understand, had one brother and one sister, both a good deal younger than himself. The brother married a Miss Craven—quite a portionless girl—and the sister married very well. She did not agree with her brother as a young girl, and went out with a friend to India, where she married Sir Hervey Lawrence, a very rich old Baronet of an excellent family. This marriage pleased her brother immensely."

"Had neither brother nor sister any children?"

"The only child of old Mr. Myddelton's bro-

ther," put in Mrs. Trent, considering, perhaps, that her daughter's genealogical powers had been taxed to the utmost, "was the miserable and abandoned Gabriel, of whom, of course, you have heard and read; we will put him out of the conversation at once, if you please. There was no other child, and Lady Lawrence had none at all, so the remaining relations, or rather connexions, are only the children of Sir Hervey Lawrence's brother and sister, and Miss Craven's brother and sister."

"The brother and sister of Miss Myddelton's husband, and the brother and sister of Mr. Myddelton's wife; do I understand that aright?" inquired her guest, quietly.

"Yes, that is it exactly," put in Miss Trent, hastening to take the conversation upon herself again. "Now see how plainly I will describe them to you. Sir Hervey's sister had two sons—my father, and Hervey's father—and his brother had one daughter, Mrs. Haughton, of The Larches, near here. She and her husband died years ago, but the son, Mr. Haughton, is a solicitor in Kinbury, and Miss Haughton keeps his house. Well, then, on the other

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side"—Miss Trent illustrated her narrative by the action of her jewelled fingers, and Mr. Keith seemed readily to follow her—"Miss Craven's brother and sister had each an only daughter. The brother's daughter is to be here to-night; and the sister's daughter is Phoebe Owen, a silly girl, who tries one's patience more than Honor does."

"Then, except yourself, Miss Trent, all the relations of Mr. Myddelton are orphans—or rather, I should say, as Mrs. Trent did, the connexions, for I fail to trace one single tie of real relationship?"

"Yes, all orphans; but how funny it is," laughed Theodora, "to speak of Mr. and Miss Haughton as orphans! Why, he is almost a middle-aged man, and she is older. He is the guardian of Honor and Phoebe, who have lived at The Larches ever since they left school."

"Mr. Haughton is a very clever lawyer," interposed Mrs. Trent, languidly; "but we do not visit, save just occasionally to keep up appearances. They move in a different circle from ours."

"I don't believe they move at all, mamma,"



smiled Theodora ; " they stagnate, I think ; and Jane Haughton looks like a curiosity when she goes out anywhere."

"After all that rigmarole, Mr. Keith," remarked Captain Hervey, from his position on the rug, "do you feel ambitious of being one of the group to be photographed in front of Abbotsmoor for Lady Lawrence's benefit?—for the picture is to be sent to her ladyship as a delicate attention from her heirs."

"A rather incongruous addition to the family group," smiled Mr. Keith.

"But I am bent upon having you among us," insisted Miss Trent. And, when she appealed to her mother, Mrs. Trent smiled assentingly, though even *she* could see how silly and inconsiderate was the request.

"Theo," remarked Captain Trent, breaking in upon the silence which followed her speech, "it is five minutes to seven. You should speak to Honor Craven about being in good time."

"I did, Hervey, and she says you told her that it was not *comme il faut* to be too early anywhere."

"I think the child is anxious to learn, Her-

vey," remarked his aunt, placidly, "and you are helping her to lose her *gaucherie*."

Reading Captain Trent's handsome, lazy smile, a suspicion crossed Royden's mind.

"But I will judge for myself," he thought; and just at that moment the drawing-room door was opened to admit the girl who had been so long sauntering from The Larches to Deergrove.

"Miss Craven."

Theodora rose to meet her cousin, but with such a very slow grace that the girl had come among them all before her hand was taken.

Royden looked up to see this "child" whom Captain Hervey was graciously instructing, and rose, prepared for his introduction. From that moment until he took his place opposite her at the dinner-table, he did not think of sitting again.

For the few minutes before the butler announced dinner, she chatted with no appearance of even seeing how her two cousins held themselves aloof from her, and with no *mauvaise honte* in the frank occasional glance she gave to

Royden Keith. In vain he looked for the *gaucherie*; in vain he looked for a glimpse of the anxiety for Captain Hervey's instruction; he only saw a young and beautiful girl whose manners had a free and natural grace which was as far removed from Theodora's languid elegance as is the flight of a swallow in the air from the gliding of a swan upon the water.


With curious intentness he watched her through those waiting minutes, and the study seemed a fresh one to this man who had travelled over half the world, and studied the beauty of so many races; and who, though little more than thirty years of age, had lived a wider, larger life than most of the grey-haired men he met.

Honor Craven rose when the servant announced the dinner for which Captain Trent had been anxiously waiting; and for the few moments that she stood there in the daylight Royden's eyes were fixed upon her. She was a girl of apparently eighteen or nineteen years of age, slight and tall, with a figure rounded to the perfection of womanhood, yet

possessing the supple grace and freedom of a child. Her dimpled arms and neck shone with a smooth and silky whiteness through her transparent dress. Her hair—rich soft hair, of bright chestnut brown—was twisted into a coil high upon her head; and, though no one could see how the ends fell naturally into loose rich curls—as they do when Honor lets it down at night—still everyone could see the soft, natural wave, where it lay across her forehead, and was brushed from her smooth white temples. Her eyes were grey, long, and beautifully shaped, ready in an instant to brighten to a sunny smile, and ready in an instant, too, to darken to a grave and tender sympathy. Her nose was small and straight; and her white and even teeth would have given beauty to any smile, even without the flash of the brilliant eyes.

All this he saw, yet he could not even have attempted a description of Honor Craven's face, because its rare and matchless beauty was a beauty not of form and tint alone.

"Hervey, I must entrust both the young ladies to you."



Mrs. Trent said this with a wave of the hand in Honor's direction, intended as a gracious encouragement for the girl to come forward and share with Theodora the ineffable advantage of Captain Hervey's support across the hall. Then the hostess laid her plump hand on Royden's sleeve, and, under his silent escort, followed the young people as near as the length of Theodora's train would allow. The few remarks she made were bland and comfortable ones, yet was she all the time keenly aware of a little scene enacted before her; and the sight brought a smile of satisfaction to her lips, and a thought which was compassionately pleasant.

"Poor child, she always feels *de trop* with Hervey and Theodora."

Mr. Keith, too, had been watching the three figures in front; and, though no smile stirred his lips, there was a glance of keen amusement in his eyes, for Honor had refused Captain Trent's arm, and was walking in her own way to the dining-room, with a pretty, quiet nonchalance which she did not attempt to hide or disguise. There were two feet at least of space between Captain Hervey's unoccupied arm and the

small gloved hand of the girl; and the watcher behind would fain have seen whether Captain Trent comprehended this behaviour in the pupil who was so eager to be initiated by him into the mysteries of "good form," and who knew nothing of "society" save what he kindly exhibited before her; but the back of Captain Trent's fair head alone was visible, and that, at all events, was unruffled.

"My nephew offered you his arm, Honor," remarked Mrs Trent, as she motioned the girl to the solitary seat on her left hand; "you should have taken it, my dear."

"Should I?" questioned Honor. "You will be tired presently of telling me what I should do or leave undone; won't you, Mrs. Trent?"

"Not if you try to learn," was the benignant reply. "Theodora and I will be patient with you to the end, and Captain Hervey is really anxious to see you study appearances. His eye, of course, is offended by awkwardness, but otherwise he is, I'm sure, pleased to see you always."

"Hervey," the girl said, turning her eyes fully upon her cousin, as he took his seat at the

foot of the table, "when shall I cease to offend your eye, so that that delightful time may come when you will be pleased to see me always?"

"I am pleased to see you now," remarked Hervey, with lazy patronage; "I was saying to Theo, only this morning, that your manners were very much improved."

"At least," observed Miss Trent, indifferently, "you said they were a pleasant contrast to Phoebe's."

"Only this morning," echoed Honor, with wilful misconception; "I'm glad you *only* said it that once. Unfortunately you have not taken so much trouble with Phoebe as you have with me," she added, stooping to inhale the fragrance of the flowers beside her plate; "you must make allowance for us both, but especially for her."

"Phoebe Owen, Mr. Keith," said Miss Trent, turning to Royden who sat beside her, "is the only one of Mr. Myddelton's relations whom you do not know now."

"Except——"

It was Honor who began the sentence, and stopped, blushing vividly, even painfully.

"Except?" Mr. Keith echoed, interrogatively.

"Honor, what pleasure can you find in dragging up forbidden subjects?" inquired Mrs. Trent; and Honor understood the hidden anger in the smooth, soft tones.

Hervey looked down upon his soup plate and Theodora attempted to quench her cousin with a glance and a curl of her lip; but Mr. Keith waited for his answer.

"I was going to say," Honor remarked, looking fully into his questioning eyes, while the bright pink faded slowly to its own delicate hue again, "except my own cousin, Gabriel Myddelton. I forgot that his name was never mentioned here. And I—I don't know why I should have spoken of him to-night. At home he is talked of only with horror and contempt. When I mention him, even myself, it is simply in utter bewilderment."

"Why?"

For a moment she read his face with a frank, gentle gaze, and then she dropped her eyes again, and answered very quietly—

"I can see that you know why."

"Please don't bring up that horrible and detestable story again," exclaimed Theodora, with

a well-feigned shudder; "we are not hardened to it by hearing it perpetually, as Honor says she does at home."

"No, Mr. Myddelton's murder is not quite a perpetual topic of conversation even at The Larches, Theodora," said Honor, speaking fearlessly, though her beautiful eyes had a great wistfulness in them.

"Mr. Keith," remarked Miss Trent, to change effectually the subject of conversation, "what a splendid horse you were riding to-day, and how tired he was! From where had you ridden?"

"From home."

Theodora glanced up with a start. One word or look of encouragement from him, and she could ask the question to which she longed to hear the answer, "Where is your home?" But there came no word or smile of encouragement, however slight, and she was fain to content herself with having achieved her primary object, and turned her guest's attention from a name which she would have given much to be able to expunge from the family tree.

Yet had Theodora quite succeeded after all? She had shown her hatred of the subject; Mrs.

Trent had skilfully withdrawn from it; Hervey had languidly ignored it; Honor Craven had blushed with a keen sense of pain or shame at mentioning it; yet no sooner had the servants left the room than this dreaded topic was uppermost once more, and even being handled by each one of the little group with an apparent indifference. Was it because Gabriel Myddelton was now spoken of only as old Myddelton's nephew, and not as a friend or relation of any one present? Or was it because there was one strong will present, which, without evidence of its power, could lead where it chose, and chose thus?

"If I am really to go with you to Abbotsmoor," Royden said, "I must first hear the entire story of old Myddelton's murder, or what interest will there be for me in the place? Miss Trent, will you tell it?"

"I suppose I must, if you ask me," she answered smiling; "but it is a very horrible story to tell, and I am not sure that I shall be able to get through it. Honor, you look as if you were prepared to interrupt me in every sentence. Eat your grapes, please. Must I really tell it

all, Mr. Keith?" and again she looked up, smilingly, into the handsome dark face.

"If you will—unless your cousin will help you."

He did not mention which cousin, but Honor very suddenly began to attend to her grapes.

CHAPTER III.

He alone whose hand is bounding
 Human power and human will,
 Looking through each soul's surrounding,
 Knows its good or ill.

WHITTIER.

“I KNOW, Mr. Keith, that you have not been in this part of the country very long,” Miss Trent began; “but still you must have heard of old Mr. Myddelton. You must have heard how he saved and accumulated his wealth until the very mention of old Myddelton’s money became a proverb conveying an idea of unlimited riches.”

“Our uncle’s existence was one long course of amassing and hoarding,” remarked Honor, speaking almost absently, while her clear, listening gaze was fixed upon Theodora’s face, “and I think the people about Abbotsmoor are

quite right when they whisper that wealth—acquired and used *so*—must bring the very reverse of a blessing to its possessor.”

“Its probable possessors do not happen to think so,” put in Captain Trent, lightly.

“They know, of course,” added Royden Keith, as he raised his wine-glass slowly to his lips, “that it depends upon themselves, and upon their use of the wealth.”

“You really want to hear the story of Mr. Myddelton’s murder, do you, Mr. Keith?” inquired Miss Trent, as she deliberately peeled the peach which she could not stop to taste; leaning forward a little, so that when she turned to Royden she could see the expression of his listening face. “I wish you had seen Abbotsmoor before I told you. We shall be there on Thursday, and I will show you the window through which the murderer forced his way.”

“I have seen Abbotsmoor; I know the window,” remarked Royden, calmly.

Miss Trent looked round, surprised.

“Oh, I did not know,” she said, vexed it would seem. “Then Lady Somerson, I suppose, anticipated our pic-nic? That was very unkind

of her, because I told her of it two weeks ago."


"No, I went alone," said Royden, in his cool grave tones. "One evening, as I passed the lodge, I was tempted in to see the gloomy old place."

"You will not think it a gloomy old place on Thursday," observed Theodora, with her most charming smile. "But I must get on with my story, or you and Hervey and mamma will be bored to death."

For an instant Royden glanced across at Honor, as if wondering why she should not be bored too. The girl's look of eager, yet sorrowful interest was answer enough.

"I told you, didn't I, that old Myddelton's brother had one only son—Gabriel? He was educated for no profession, because, of course, he was known to be his uncle's heir. After his parents died—they died when he was quite a child—he lived entirely at Abbotsmoor. His uncle did not send him to college; and he wasn't very well educated, was he, mamma?"

"As I remember him," remarked Mrs. Trent, indifferently, "he was a quiet, gentlemanly



young man, amiable, and easily led, but with a pernicious habit of arguing certain matters with his uncle. At that time I never imagined what awful passions lay beneath this quiet demeanour; still I always, even then, considered him inexcusably ungrateful for what was done for him, of a moody nature, and sadly deficient in refinement of taste. He could not bear the restraint of a regular life at Abbotsmoor; indeed he made no secret of the fact that the order and punctuality of his uncle's house were irksome to him."

"But order and punctuality were not all, Mrs. Trent," put in Honor, speaking with quiet earnestness. "I have often heard that life at Abbotsmoor was utterly sordid and utterly solitary."

"And Gabriel Myddelton," remarked Royden, refilling Theodora's glass with great leisureliness, without one glance into Honor's face, "was perhaps by nature neither utterly sordid nor utterly solitary."

"He proved himself both to no mean extent," returned Captain Trent.

"He proved himself," added Theodora, with

a slow elevation of her eyebrows, "a hundred thousand times worse than that; and it is no wonder—is it, Mr. Keith?—that we are all ashamed of even belonging to the family of Gabriel Myddelton."

"Miss Craven, I believe," said Royden, "is the only one at all allied to him. How does she bear the heavy yoke of such a connection?"

As he gazed into Honor's face, he saw her cheeks burn; and knowing the colour must be born either of a great pain or a great shame, he turned the question aside.

"Now, Miss Trent, what a long time we hover on the verge of that murder!"

"Honor, do not interrupt me again," said Theodora, once more taking up the thread which it pleased her to fancy that Honor had broken. "Well, Mr. Keith, once Gabriel and old Mr. Myddelton had a quarrel, and it ended in Gabriel's either being turned out of the house, or voluntarily leaving it. A message was sent at once to summon Mr. Myddelton's lawyer—the firm in Kinbury was Carter and Haughton in those days; now Mr. Haughton (I told you he was one of old Myddelton's relations and Honor's

guardian) has the whole business. Well, Mr. Carter came, and Mr. Myddelton made his will, leaving his property, as I told you, to his sister, Lady Lawrence, to be, by her, bequeathed among his connections. The lawyer was at Abbotsmoor nearly all day, and when he left the house at last, he met Gabriel returning to it. They stopped a little time talking, and Mr. Carter, being a silly, chatty old gentleman, told Gabriel of the will he had just left in his client's *secrétaire*, and which would leave him penniless instead of a millionaire; adding a word of advice to him to try to regain his old position before it was too late.

Then they separated. That night—oh, this is a dreadful story to tell!" cried Theodora, interrupting herself with a clasp of her white hands. "I wish you had not asked me, Mr. Keith."

"Perhaps some one else will finish the story for you," he suggested.

But Theodora had no real desire for another to take her place as long as she could win—even by this story from which she pretended to shrink—a claim on his undivided attention.

"No, I will go on, as you wish it," she said, acceding gracefully. "Next morning old Mr. Myddelton was found murdered in the wood beyond the shrubbery; the window of his room had been forced open, the lock of the secrétaire wrenched, and the will was gone; and, more than that, upon the carpet lay Mr. Myddelton's candlestick and the velvet cap he always wore in the house, and on both there were stains of blood."

"Judging by those premises," remarked Royden, "Mr. Myddelton had been struck within the room by the thief who had stolen the will; he had followed the thief across the lawn and through the shrubbery to the wood. Here there must have been another struggle, which ended in the old man's death. Was that the general supposition?"

"It was exactly so," returned Hervey, "and proved, of course, to have been Gabriel Myddelton's act."

"It was easy to prove that," put in Mrs. Trent, with languid contempt. "Gabriel was caught in an attempt to leave England; and, in the bag he carried were found fragments of the

missing will. Of course there could not be a doubt after that; but, even if there had been, it was dispelled upon the trial."

"Whose evidence in Court could go beyond that forcible fact of the destroyed will being found in his possession, and his being caught endeavouring to escape?"


"But, Mr. Keith, there *was* even further evidence, and that doomed him at once," replied Theodora. "The counsel for the prosecution brought forward a girl named Margaret Territ, who lived with her father in a cottage on the outer border of the wood, and she had terrible evidence to give, though she had with much trouble been prevailed upon to give it. On that evening of the murder, she said, Gabriel Myddelton had gone to their cottage and told them of his quarrel with his uncle. He had told them of old Mr. Myddelton's having made a will to disinherit him, and even where it was put. Her father could prove this, the girl added, for he had been present, and had waited to cheer young Mr. Myddelton a bit before he went away to the mines, where he was on night-work. At night, when she was sitting alone in the cot-

tage, Gabriel came again, very quietly and cautiously, she said, his face white and scared, as she could see even by the firelight, for he would not let her light a candle. He asked for water to wash his hands, and when he had washed them he opened the back-door of the cottage and threw the water on the soil; then he drew off his white wristbands, crushed them up in his hand, and burnt them to ashes in the fire; and then he borrowed from her an old coat of her father's. The poor girl seems to have unquestioningly done all the wicked fellow asked her; and she had even promised to hide or destroy the coat he left behind him. But I suppose her father's sense of justice came to her aid, and prevented her fulfilling her promise. The coat was shown on the trial, and there, on one shoulder and on one wrist, were stains of blood again."

"Stronger evidence was never brought against a prisoner. Of course they hanged him?"

"He was convicted, certainly," replied Theodora, "but he escaped."

A little silence fell upon the group, and then



again Royden's voice coolly and easily broke the stillness.

"How about the will, Miss Trent?"

"Fortunately," explained Theodora, with as much emphasis as her constitutional languor would permit, "Mr. Carter had a duplicate of the will, so that it did not signify about that copy having been destroyed by his client's nephew."

"If Mr. Carter had but told Gabriel that," exclaimed Honor, involuntarily, "nothing need have happened."

"Or rather," added Hervey, "the old lawyer might have been murdered too."

"Exactly," assented Royden, with a nod of prompt acquiescence. "How did Myddelton manage the escape from gaol?"

"Oh, pray do not begin another long story about that wicked young man, Theodora," cried Mrs. Trent, smiling graciously upon her guest. "You are wearying Mr. Keith. What interest can he take in such an account of crime and craft?"

"It does interest me, Mrs. Trent," her guest answered, with grave courtesy; "I—have been a

barrister, and such things still interest me keenly."

"Have been a barrister!" echoed Theodora, wonderingly, and not too politely. "How strange that seems! I only mean," she added, in graceful confusion, "that you seem so young to talk of what you *have been*—in a profession, too, where a man must bring the experience of years to follow it successfully; besides——"

But Theodora stopped there; she could not add aloud the wonder how he had travelled so much, and was so rich and idle now, if his profession had *only* been that of a barrister.

"If you have been a barrister, Mr. Keith," said Hervey, gazing curiously at him, "I wonder you are not *au fait* in this story of young Myddelton's trial and escape."

"I have heard of it, but no one ever gave me the particulars exactly as you have done. I did not read a word of it in the papers at the time."

"That was odd."

"Very odd," assented Royden, lazily; "be-

sides which, another thing strikes me as odd. You said that Gabriel Myddelton was weak and cowardly; if so, how did he manage his escape after conviction? Such a thing would, I should imagine, require skill and courage."

"I think," said Theodora, hastily putting in a reply, "that when you hear the particulars of his escape you will see that it was chiefly managed for him—he had but little need of skill and courage himself."

"But who would care to run such risks for a condemned criminal?"

"I think you will see when I tell you the story," replied Miss Trent; "but you must wait for that until we are at Abbotsmoor on Thursday. Mamma will not object then; will you, mamma dear?"

"Even I have never heard the whole story of Gabriel's escape," said Honor, breaking her attentive silence; "but of course it was Margaret Territ, or her father, who planned it and helped him."

"You were but a little child when the murder was committed," observed Royden; "you do

not, I suppose, remember Gabriel Myddelton?"

"No, it was ten years ago, and I was only eight; but I've seen his picture at Abbots-moor."

"A weak face, had he?"

"I can hardly say. It is very boyish, I think, and delicate."

"It does not remind you of the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's?"

"Oh, no!" she answered. Then her pretty laugh broke off suddenly, and her eyes darkened with an anxious wistfulness. "Mr. Keith, do *you* feel sure that my cousin Gabriel was guilty of that theft and murder?"

She could not help her eyes betraying her longing that he should contradict this fact—which no one yet had ever doubted; nor could he help that one bound which his heart gave when he saw how she waited for his answer.

"There seems no room for doubt," he said. "The flight and escape are both terrible stumbling-blocks to any belief in Gabriel Myddelton's innocence."

"Oh, no!" she interrupted eagerly, though

her tone was very low. "You forget, Mr. Keith, that the escape was *after* conviction. It was too late for any innocence to save him then, even if——"

"Even if he had been innocent—yes," returned Royden; "but I see no loophole for escape from such a verdict as the jury brought."

"And you think he was guilty?"

There gathered a strange, warm light in Royden's eyes as he answered her with quiet earnestness—

"You must let me answer this question on some future day. I have not even heard the whole history yet."

"You shall hear it at Abbotsmoor on Thursday," put in Theodora, graciously, "and then you will see—as I told you—all old Myddelton's connections together—of course excepting Gabriel."

"Of course excepting Gabriel," assented Royden. "And about the property? It, I suppose, went as it was willed; and Lady Lawrence holds the power of dividing it among you, or bequeathing it to one alone?"

"Yes, it rests with her entirely; and at

Christmas she is coming over to make the acquaintance of all the family, preparatory to making her will. We receive these messages through her solicitors in London, for she herself never writes to any of us."

"She is a widow, I presume?"

"Yes, and has been a widow for many years, with no family of her own."

"A good thing for us," put in Captain Hervey, placidly, "for you must own there are plenty of us to choose from."

"And both her possible heirs," added Theodora, with a little quiet malice, "are named after her husband or herself. Old Sir Hervey Lawrence belonged to this neighbourhood, you see; and so we have Hervey Myddelton Trent here, and Lawrence Myddelton Haughton at The Larches."

"And all we girls have Myddelton for a second name," put in Honor, laughing.

"Strange of Lady Lawrence to wait so long before she comes to visit her family or her native place."

"She never liked Abbotsmoor," Mrs. Trent replied. "I believe she never liked England;



and I'm sure she did not care for her brother."

"Suppose she never comes, but leaves her money to Indian charities?" said Honor.

"She dare not," retorted Theodora, quickly. "She is bound to leave it as Mr. Myddelton arranged, either to one of us, or to some of us, or to all of us."

"Who is the most likely to inherit it?" questioned Royden, coolly.

"I should certainly never dream of the other side the house——"

"Do not hesitate to say it, Hervey," observed Honor, in his pause. "You mean that she will never acknowledge the Cravens. I don't think she will, Mr. Keith. Mr. Myddelton was very angry with his brother for marrying my aunt. The Cravens were poor, and always had been poor; and—it is to be surmised—they always will be poor."

"You are evidently grieving for that."

"Yes," she answered, with no shade of grief in her eyes. "I should love to be rich—I think."

"Strangething," mused Royden, "that the old

Squire should at last shuffle off the responsibility of his wealth upon his sister. Has she been using the money since his death?"

"No; it has been accumulating, luckily for us," replied Hervey; "indeed it was accumulating for years before his death. Old Myddelton's money is more than a million in hard cash now, independent of the landed property."

"Lady Lawrence may very well divide such wealth as that."

"Yes, of course she may, Mr. Keith," assented his hostess, languidly; "but still, I fancy, she will choose an heir, and that will naturally be Hervey."

"But Mr. Haughton is as nearly related to her, is he not?"

"Oh, she will not think of him," interposed Captain Trent, superciliously; "he is a regular snob, settled down into a pettifogging country lawyer, and almost as mean as was old Myddelton himself."

"Suppose you were to recollect the fact that he's my guardian, Hervey," observed Honor, quietly.

"That would make no difference," returned

Captain Trent, laughing. "You know very well how little *you* think of him."

A vivid, painful blush rose to the girl's cheeks, and even Royden could see that she had not the power of contradicting that last statement.

"Perhaps," he said, "Lady Lawrence may choose an heiress in preference to an heir. She might very naturally wish for a young relative to live with her, as she has no daughters of her own."

"So I often say," spoke Mrs. Trent, blandly ; "and it pleases me to think how admirably my daughter is fitted for the post."

"More than the others?"

Theodora turned to Mr Keith in blank astonishment when he uttered that cool question ; but the sight of his handsome, careless face disarmed her quick suspicion.

"As for the others," she said, with a deprecatory gesture of her hands, "Jane Haughton would grind and save like an exaggerated female copy of old Myddelton himself, and Phoebe would spend all the money on her person."

"It is a small person to spend a million on,"

observed Honor, with a quick flash in her eyes, half of anger, half of amusement.

"And——" questioned Royden, his own eyes full of laughter.

"The only other niece is Honor," said Theodora, hurrying over the words, "and I'm sure she would not have an idea what to do with the money ; should you, Honor?"

"Yes. I would live all alone in a splendid house, where no one should order me about."

"What a childish idea!" said Theodora, with a curl of her lip.

"And I would do good to others, for I could afford to pay for a master in deportment, and so relieve Hervey from his most onerous duty."

"You are right. Such wealth should have some such noble end in view," said Royden, with a laugh of quiet irony. "Gold is, as we all know, 'Heaven's physic, Life's restorative,' but we also know there are other virtues it can possess."

"There is one evil it cannot cure," observed Honor, puzzling a little over his tone, but answering it merrily, "and that is our family

failing—avarice. I often think how readily Lady Lawrence will recognise us all as Myddeltons, when she sees us crowding eagerly about her, and paying court to the riches which she holds in bond for some of us.”

“‘All the women of Blois are freckled and ill-tempered,’” quoted Royden, rising as Mrs. Trent rose.

Honor paused where she stood, and forgot every practical answer to Captain Hervey’s catechism on the exigencies of society.

“How do you mean, Mr. Keith?”

He smiled into the innocent, questioning eyes, and answered her, while Mrs. Trent and Theodora swept ominously past.

“A lazy traveller in Blois, who found his landlady freckled and ill-tempered, wrote his experience so—‘All the women of Blois are freckled and ill-tempered.’”

“I hope, Honor,” remarked Mrs. Trent, as the girl entered the drawing-room, “that you may some day grow to understand what is required of you when you are the least important person in company. I despair of ever teaching you.”

"Suppose I learn that thoroughly, and then find I am not always the least important person in company," said Honor, with a mischievous glance from under her lashes. "I shall have all to unlearn, and a fresh lesson to begin. Oh, dear me! how pleasant it would be if one need only act on instinct!"

"If I were a girl like you, Honor," put in Theodora, with an exaggerated expression of despair, and perhaps not very strict adherence to truth, "I should feel very grateful to those who tried to train me."

"Under those circumstances it might almost be a good thing if you were me," was Honor's dry and ungrammatical rejoinder, as she took as comfortable a seat as Mrs. Trent and Theodora allowed her, and settled herself to gain as much enjoyment as possible from the inevitable dissertation on dress.

"It would be rude to take a book and entertain myself with other people's thoughts," she mused, when at last Mrs. Trent succumbed to her after-dinner somnolence, and Theodora posed herself in an attitude of graceful indolence, "but I am apparently at

liberty to indulge my own—such as they are.”

There was a circular mirror on the wall opposite her, and between the candles burning on each side of it she could see the fireside group; the elder lady sleeping in her chair, comfortable and handsome, and the younger one almost as motionless, with one ringed hand supporting the fair, regular face, round which the mirror showed such gorgeous setting of silk and gold.

In each of us lurks some vein of true genius. Though sometimes so slight that, in the gloom of unappreciation, or the glory of a greater light, it is not seen, the golden thread is pretty sure to be there.

Theodora Trent possessed no brilliant talent or versatile powers. She had no depth, or force, or strength of character, but she had that one slender filament in her nature, and knew its power. She understood exactly how far the splendour of dress was needed to give effect to her shallow, toneless beauty; and in this matter, which was her one deep study, she was thoroughly and, indeed, to a certain extent, dangerously, skilled. At every ball she attend-

ed (and Miss Trent favoured all she could, both in town and county) she was looked upon as a formidable rival by many a prettier and brighter and better girl; and not a few of the young men who stood up with her to dance felt proudly conscious of having won the most admired partner in the room. What wonder? The face is, after all, but a trifling part of the whole; and who could miss variety and brightness there, when they found it in the manifold adornments which Theodora carried so well?

Honor's eyes lingered long on these two figures, hardly glancing for a moment at her own, so still and white.

"Suppose," she mused idly to herself, "that were the mirror of Lao, and reflected the mind as well as the person. What should I see? Not much," she added, with a half-smile, still unconsciously ignoring her own image; "there is not much in either Mrs. Trent or Theodora which it would need Lao's glass to reflect."

As she thought this, still with her eyes upon the mirror, the door behind her was opened,

and another figure was added to the group on which she gazed. Then an involuntary and rather puzzled feeling rose in her mind, that this figure had given a new character to the picture in the glass.

"Now," she said, letting her fanciful thoughts run on—"if it were but the glass of Lao *now*!"

Most probably Royden Keith would have objected to enter the room at all if that circular mirror had been the magic instrument she thought of, but, being the harmless reflector it was, he sat down opposite it with the greatest ease, and was to all appearance totally unconscious of its very presence on the wall.

Mrs. Trent, wide awake now, graciously called Honor over to sit beside her while she sipped her tea; and then entreated her daughter to sing a duet with Hervey, and to persuade Mr. Keith to sing with her too.

Theodora did sing with her cousin, once or twice, and then once or twice alone; then once or twice with Mr. Keith, but Honor had not been asked, when, feeling the neglect acutely, she rose and said that she must go home.

"Jane told me to be early," she explained,

standing before Mrs. Trent, with a fading flush upon her cheeks. And just then the mirror gave back a lovely picture, while Royden Keith stood waiting for his hand-shake. There was no intentness in his gaze, yet for all his life this picture lived unblemished in his memory.

"This is a new idea, Honor," observed Captain Trent, coming forward with a shade of annoyance on his face. "Why should Jane's wishes be paramount? Are they not alone at The Larches to-night?"

"I hope so."

"Whom are you afraid of finding at home?" inquired Theodora, wondering why Mr. Keith smiled, when of course he could not understand anything about Honor's home.

"I know," drawled Hervey, with his lazy smile; "it's little Slimp."

"Yes," echoed Honor, demurely; "it's little Slimp."

"Slimp—Slimp? I have surely heard that name before," put in Royden, with a great amusement in his eyes. "I almost think I have had the honour of seeing the gentleman to

whom the name belongs ; a man of huge proportions and frank expression of countenance ; a man without fear, or guile, or——Why are you laughing, Miss Craven ?”

“If you had tried to describe the exact opposite of the Mr. Slimp I know,” said Honor, “you could not have succeeded better.”

“Indeed ! Then please describe to me the Mr. Slimp you know.”

“Not I, Mr. Keith,” laughed the girl, “except to tell you that, like Slender, ‘he hath but a little wee face, with a little yellow beard—a Cain-coloured beard.’”

“And you do not like him ?”

“Like him !” The shy, proud colour was rising again under Royden’s steadfast gaze. “Not one atom !” she said, as she gave her hand to Mrs. Trent. And in that tone of prompt contempt she dropped the subject.

“If you are walking home, you will, I hope, allow me to walk with you, Miss Craven.”

Theodora looked up in surprise. One of the men-servants had always been sent to attend Honor back to The Larches after an evening at Deergrove. Surely that was suffi-

cient, without Mr. Keith offering his escort.

"That is unnecessary," interposed Captain Hervey, stopping as he loitered towards the door; "I am going with Miss Craven."

"And you, Mr. Keith," said Theodora, advancing with her gracious smile, "must stay and play that game of chess which I have set my heart upon. See how early it is, and I am ready. Good night again, Honor."

.
"Mamma," said Theodora, an hour later, when the mother and daughter were left alone together, "you must ask Mr. Keith to stay with us for a week or two; he is only at the hotel, you know, and you might quite properly do it while Hervey is here."

Mrs. Trent's breath came for a minute in hurried gasps.

"Theo," she said, "I have been surprised at you all evening; I am doubly surprised now. Pray do not let Hervey see this sudden and ridiculous infatuation."

"Hervey will never see anything in me which is ridiculous," was Theo's complacent rejoinder; "but, mamma, you must own how



immeasurably superior Mr. Keith is to the men one generally meets."

"And after all, what do we know of him?" inquired the elder lady, pettishly.

"This," returned the younger one, as if the subject were a pleasant one to her, and she were quite willing to linger over it. "We know that he is a thorough and perfect gentleman, to whom society has evidently thrown open her doors. We know that he has travelled a great deal, and seen a great deal, and is very clever. We know how different he looked from all the gentlemen at the Castle the other night, and how jealous the girls were about him, and we see how womanish he makes Hervey look. And we know," concluded Theodora, moving her head slowly before the glass to catch the light upon the jewelled butterfly in her hair, "that he is very rich."

"Theo, my dear," urged Mrs. Trent cautiously—for, like all weak and indulgent mothers, she dreaded her daughter's displeasure being turned directly against herself—"of course you can enjoy Mr. Keith's society while he stays in this neighbourhood, but you will be most unwise

if you excite Hervey's jealousy. Mr. Keith may be a rich man—I do not doubt it—but what would his wealth be compared with that which Hervey is likely to inherit? Remember, Theo, that my heart is set upon your making a good match. It is," concluded Mrs. Trent, pathetically, "the only aim for which I care to live."

"All right, mamma," returned Theodora, brusquely; "I will take care that your aim is attained. I will not quarrel with Hervey, but I will do as I like just at present."

.
Royden Keith had, like his fellow-guest, walked to Deergrove that evening, and now was walking back to Kinbury. It was a pleasant autumn night, and he went leisurely and thoughtfully along the highway, until he entered the town close to the hotel where he was staying. Then he quickened his steps, for in front of the lighted entrance there stood a tax-cart and a foaming little thoroughbred which he knew. A servant-man in a livery of white and green—a livery we have seen before at the roadside tavern near Abbotsmoor—touched his hat from the driver's seat as Royden passed into

the vestibule of the hotel, where another servant, in the same livery, came forward to meet him.

"What is it?" asked Royden, as he pleasantly returned the man's respectful greeting.

"A letter, sir."

"Any orders to yourselves?" inquired Royden, as he took the letter.

"No orders, sir, except what you should give us."

"Then go back at once. Say I am coming to-morrow. Take something at the bar, and send Morris to do the same; then drive back at once. Good night."

Seated in his own room, with the lamp lighted and the shutters closed, Royden read the letter. The writing was clear and the lines uncrossed, but yet it took him a long time to read; for the sheets of paper were large and transparent, as if the letter had come from, or was destined for, some distant country.

When he had finished, and replaced the two thin sheets within their cover, he rose and rang his bell.

"I want," he said when the door was opened

by a grave, middle-aged man in black, "to speak to Edwards. Send him up here, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are the other men gone?"

"Some time ago, sir."

The groom, whom his master had called Edwards, donned his livery hastily when his master's valet summoned him.

"I know what it is," he muttered, "a gallop all the way to the Towers and back. That's just like him."

"If you mean he'd take the gallop himself and think nothing of it, you're about right," returned the valet, curtly; "but unless that is what you mean, you are a good way off being right; for he isn't one to send his servants galloping about when they ought to be in bed."

"No, he isn't generally," acquiesced the groom, a little less sulkily; "but it does make one cross to have to dress again. Do I look all right now, Mr. Pierce?"

The "gentleman's gentleman," smiled with generous condescension. "You are a vain, churlish fellow," it said, as plain as smile could

—and so young a one?”

He smiled still more when the groom returned to him in ten minutes' time, brisk, alert, and good-humoured, as he had been in his master's presence.

“If it's ‘just like him’ for the master to drive his men about inconsiderately and inconsistently,” the valet remarked, aloud, “I wonder why they should look as if they felt all the pleasanter for their interviews with him. He doesn't quite treat you as if you were cattle—eh, Edwards?”

“He's going off at dawn,” explained the groom, ignoring that question; “I'm to have Princess saddled by the first glimpse of daylight. He's writing now, and told me to tell you not to stay up. He'll be back to-morrow afternoon, he says. Where d'you think he's going, Mr. Pierce?”

“I know,” said Pierce, quietly, as he turned away, “he's going home.”

“Home!” echoed the younger man, when he was left to himself. “I don't know much, p'raps; but I do know what that means.”

CHAPTER IV.

I do not love thee, Doctor Fell—
 The reason why I cannot tell ;
 But this alone I know full well,
 I do not love thee, Doctor Fell.

Tom Brown.

IT was no very new thing for Captain Trent to be walking with Honor Craven along the road which lay between Deergrove and The Larches, but something seemed to strike him as new in the performance to-night.

"You are not talking at all, Honor," he said at last, when the reason of the novelty dawned upon him. "What a very unusual thing! It does not show nicely-regulated manners to talk a good deal at one time, and say nothing at all at another."

"Hervey," said the girl, pausing suddenly

in her walk, and turning her eyes upon him so that he could see their laughter in the gloom, "don't you lecture me when nobody is present. When Mrs. Trent and Theodora are by, it affords them great pleasure to hear you, so I don't mind; but when we have no audience we will have no performance, please. On those occasions—being, as they are, very few and very far between—we will imagine ourselves on an equality. Now we will talk as much as you like, for I shall soon be at home. Hervey, who is Mr. Keith?"

"Why do you want to know?" inquired Captain Trent, speaking sharply, but whether in consequence of Honor's introductory speech or of that last question was not clear.

"It does not signify; I can find out from Lawrence."

"He is as likely to be an adventurer as not," suggested Hervey, spitefully; "looking after Theodora for her fortune, and for her expectation of a share of old Myddelton's money."

"I should have thought you old enough to know a true gentleman when you met him," observed Honor, with provoking gravity. "And,

if he really is come to woo Theodora, what shall you do?"

"Why?" he asked, his tone a trifle harsh, either in anger or self-consciousness.

"Because you are to marry her, you know."

"Do not say 'you know,' Honor; it is unnecessary and inelegant, and I do *not* know, though you do, it would seem."

"Of course I do; everybody knows it."

"Of course I could win her if I chose," mused Hervey, complacently, "if that is what you mean by everybody knowing I am to do so."

Honor's laugh rang fresh and clear on the night air, and naturally it roused Captain Hervey's languid wrath.

"It is most childish to laugh at nothing, as you do, Honor."

"Only yesterday you told me it was childish to laugh at everything. You are inconsistent, Hervey, if you guide me at once in opposite directions."

"If Mr. Keith wins Theodora and her fortune," remarked Hervey, presently, with an idea of stern retaliation, "what will Lawrence Haughton do?"

Because everybody knows, as you say, that Lawrence is to marry a rich wife if he marries at all."

No answer, so he put the question direct.

"Do you think Haughton will marry a rich wife?"

"I hope he will."

"Why?"

"Because," she answered, with a tightening of her lips, "he won't be at all happy if he does—men never are who marry for money—nor will she. It is you who are laughing nothing now, Hervey."

"Your notions of the world seem to be gleaned from novels. Why do you not wish he would marry a penniless wife, just to spite Jane?"

"Because—Jane would break the heart of the penniless wife."

"Honor!"

"Yes, I'm here."

"Why, you have tears in your voice! Are you so unhappy at The Larches?"

"I was not thinking of myself," returned Honor, hastily.

"Don't grieve for Phoebe," said Hervey, in a tone of relief; "she doesn't feel these things. It is far harder to you, Honor, to bear the love of the man you scorn, than it is to her to bear the scorn of the man she loves—poor girl!"

"Hervey, how dare you speak so!" cried Honor, passionately. "You know nothing about this—about Phoebe or about me. I will not allow you to talk so to me of my cousin, or of myself. Do not ever again pretend you can teach me to be a gentlewoman, for you do not yourself know how to be a gentleman. Go back! I'm quite safe; I would rather not have you."

"My dear Honor," he began, in his most plausible tones, "you should try not to be so hasty. Why should I not mention what, to use your own words, everybody knows? Phoebe makes no secret of her infatuation for Lawrence, and Lawrence makes no secret of his indifference to her, so why should I? You make no secret of your indifference to Lawrence, and he certainly makes no secret of his infatuation for you, so why should I?"

"It is most ungenerous," said Honor, hotly ; and then she maintained perfect silence for the rest of their walk.

The Larches was a sombre red-brick house, standing a little way from the road, and separated from it by half-a-dozen yards of brick wall between two white gates at either end of the curved drive which passed the front door. At this door Honor stood in the darkness, wondering rather anxiously who would let her in. Hervey had left her at the gate ; but, though she did not know it, he was lingering there, waiting to see her safely into the house. He had not long to wait ; the door was opened promptly to her summons, and he saw her enter the lighted hall.

"It was Haughton himself who let her in," muttered Captain Trent as he walked away. "She will be vexed if no one else has waited up for her ; and certainly it cannot be by Phoebe's own choice that she has left Haughton to do it alone."

He hastened on now, "whistling as he went, for want of thought," and by this time Honor and Mr. Haughton had entered the warm and lighted drawing-room.

"Everyone gone to bed!" she exclaimed, a note of keen vexation in her tone. "Why did not Phoebe sit up for me? She promised she would, and I am as early as Jane bade me be."

"I told Phoebe to go to bed," returned Mr. Haughton, gently taking off the soft white shawl which Honor had worn under her dark cloak. "I chose to wait for you, and I did not need any one to keep me company."

Honor glanced at him for one moment as he stood in the full light, and then she quietly pushed away the chair he had drawn up to the fire for her.

Honor's guardian was a man of forty, a little above the middle height, but so broadly built that he looked below it. His hair was thickly streaked with gray, and his moustache—gray too—was heavy and coarse; his face habitually shrewd and callous, and his eyes habitually keen and restless; for any other expression which might be upon his face to-night, or at other times when he was alone with Honor, was not its customary one. He was a powerful man, both physically and mentally; a man who seemed to have his passions and his words con-

pletely under his control, and who, if he had not, might be perhaps a dangerous man to thwart or anger. His clients spoke of him as a safe and self-concentrated lawyer, as hard to understand as to bend; a clever fellow, whose soft, white fingers could unravel, in that constant silence of his, the most intricate knot in law. But there was one inmate of his house who knew him in two characters, and who put no trust in either.

"I have coffee ready for you, Honor," said Mr. Haughton, taking the coffee-pot from the fire and carrying it to the table where stood one solitary cup; "I know it will refresh you after your walk."

"Thank you," said Honor, but her voice, for all its gentleness, was utterly indifferent, and Lawrence Haughton noticed this.

"Have you had a pleasant evening?" he asked, rather nervously pursuing his unwonted and womanish task.

"A little better than usual," she said, quietly; "but I'm very sleepy, Lawrence. May I go to bed?"

"Just wait until you have drunk this coffee,

dear. I made it myself on purpose for you, and I have kept it hot, and fancied you would enjoy it."

He had come up to her then, with the cup in his hand, and she could not turn away. She took it with a little laugh, fresh and sweet.

"You look odd at that task, Lawrence. Why did you attempt it?"

"Because it was for you," he said, with a subdued eagerness in his tone. "There is no task I would not attempt for you, Honor."

"I hope there is," she answered, very gently; "and please let Phoebe keep her promise next time, and sit up for me, Lawrence."

"Any one but me," he said, a dark flush rising in his face; "yet my only pleasure through this day has been the anticipation of these few minutes, when I should have you here to talk to me and look at me, as you rarely do when you have others to see or speak to."

There was silence between them then, while he tried to school his tones to easy indifference such as hers, and while she wondered childishly whether her guardian's culinary achievement was known to his sister, whose one strong idea

was that it was he who ought to be waited on by all the household.

“Who was at Deergrove to-night, Honor?”

Lawrence was standing against the mantelpiece, watching the face of the girl beside him; and it seemed as if, when she had answered the question, his gaze grew more intent and even stern.

“Only one gentleman—Mr. Keith. He is staying at the Royal Hotel in Kinbury now; he has been visiting Sir Philip Somerson at the Castle. I do not know whether he stays for the shooting, or because he likes the neighbourhood. Do you know him, Lawrence?”

“As much,” returned Mr. Haughton, apparently making an effort to speak easily, “as I know any other idle young fellow who comes to stay in the town for a time, professedly for the Abbotsmoor fishing, or shooting, or what not—that is all.”

“I will say good night now, Lawrence.”

He put down the empty cup, and then took her offered hand. “Good night,” he echoed; “how you hasten to utter it! Nothing I can do or say ever tempts you to linger with me. My

beautiful child, my favourite, if you would only consent to learn one lesson from Phœbe !”

“I am too old to learn,” said Honor, defying the pain which such words always gave her, in spite of their frequency. “Oh Lawrence, I wish you were as sleepy as I am ! You would hurry me off, and I should be so grateful to you afterwards.”

“Honor,” he said, looking longingly in her sweet, pure face, and still holding her hand tightly in his own, “years ago, when you were a little one—my favourite then as always, and even then the very sunshine of my life—you used to bring your good night kiss and lay it softly on my lips. Do you remember ? And do you remember how I would never let Phœbe kiss me afterwards ? No, of course you do not. You were but a child ; what could you know of such feelings, or of the dreams that were my very life-breath even then, and which you are trying now to kill for me ?”

“If you could guess how unhappy you make me by talking so, Lawrence,” the girl returned, still very gently, “I think you would not do it so often. Let us be just what we were in those

times you have been talking of—cousins, as it were, or ward and guardian, which you will—but do not talk of other love between us. It is impossible. You know it, and you have known it always, if you would only own it to yourself. You know, too, that I have no home but yours; and, if you were generous, you would not take every opportunity of making me unhappy with this worn-out subject. Oh, why,” she cried, her hands clasped tightly to her breast, “should you have given me this passion you call love? You knew I never could love you. You have yourself told me how I would not go near you when I first came here, a little child. You have told me how your sister tried in vain to teach me to admire you, and Phœbe tried in vain to teach me to worship you, and you yourself tried—oh, so much more in vain!—to teach me to love you. Knowing all this, why do you speak to me, so often, as you have done to-night? What right have I given you?”

“None. I have taken the right,” said Lawrence, his breath quick and hard. “Your pride and indifference, through these ten years, has only made my love all the stronger—never

mind why, we cannot understand these things—but you are a woman now, and must repay me for these years of pain and waiting, Honor. This long and slighted love of mine *shall* win a return. You cannot crush or kill it, for it is stronger than yourself, and will conquer you.”

“I shall go away from here if you ever speak to me so again,” said the girl, with a flash of wrath in her eyes “or I must pass it by as something too—too trivial for notice.”

“And I,” returned Lawrence, speaking as sternly as he ever could to her, “shall never leave off telling you of my love until you own your love is mine at last.”

She walked quietly from the room even while he spoke; but he followed her, eager to do something for her even then.

“Why, Lawrence,” she said, taking her candle from his hand, and by an effort speaking in her old tones, just as if that interview had never been, “there is a light in your room! Who is there?”

“Only Slimp,” returned Mr. Haughton, looking with annoyance towards the line of light

from the door of his private room. "He has a deed to copy for me, and he's late over it. Never mind him; he will not be here for breakfast."

"*Those* are good tidings," said Honor, emphatically; and, glancing at the door with an inimitable mimicry of Mr. Slimp's normal expression, she ran lightly and noiselessly upstairs.

Mr. Haughton, smiling at the remembrance of her comical grimace, watched her till she turned out of sight, and then entered his own room, the stern and watchful man of business now, the unmoved man of the world.

"You have all your instructions, Slimp. so you can go to bed when you like. There will be breakfast for you in this room at seven, and you will be gone before I come down."

"Very well, sir," was Mr. Slimp's unquestioning assent. But he looked as if he understood an omitted margin to the words; and if Honor had been there, she might have looked in vain for the deed he had been copying.

"Do the Temple thoroughly; study the records, and leave no stone unturned. I have written on the back of this card a few headings

to remind you, and on the other side is the name. Keep the card carefully—I had trouble enough to get it.”

Mr. Slimp took it from Mr. Haughton's hand deliberately; read the penciled instructions through with still more deliberation; then turned the card round, and read the name engraved upon the other side—“Royden Keith.”

CHAPTER V.

HERMIA.—I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.

HELENA.—O that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!

HERMIA.—The more I hate, the more he follows me.

HELENA.—The more I love, the more he hateth me.

Midsummer Night's Dream.

“A SLEEP, Phoebe?”

At the sound of Honor's bright voice, and at the sight of her face round the half-opened door of Phoebe's bed-room, a head sprang from the pillow, and an eager whisper bade her come in and shut the door.

So Honor came in and shut the door, obediently; then, putting her candlestick down upon the dressing-table, and taking up an easy position on the bed, with her back against the iron footrail, she looked across into her cousin's face, and remarked, sententiously, that she was back again. And then her wakeful eyes went

wandering round the little untidy chamber as if it were all strange to them, with a shadow in them deeper than their wonder—a shadow which now and then *did* fall upon their brightness at odd times and in familiar scenes, as if, even yet, the life which had been hers ever since she could remember, had its dark, inscrutable corners which she searched in vain.

There was little to gaze upon in this bed-room of Phoebe's, so it was no wonder that the girl's eyes soon came back to the face opposite her, and rested there.

"Why, Phoebe," Honor said then, "you have been crying!"

Phoebe was sitting up in bed, with her hands locked about her knees, and her broad, Dutch-looking face—rather pretty, but soulless and self-absorbed—was flushed and stained with tears.

"Crying?" she stammered, and both the repetition of the word and the mortified gaze betrayed the dependence and the self-consciousness of her character. "Why should you say so?"

"I am led to that conclusion by the sight of

tears. Am I as wise as that doctor's assistant who knew his patient had been eating horse because he caught sight of the saddle under the bed?"

"I did cry," replied Phoebe, plaintively, "because Lawrence would not let me sit up for you, as I'd promised, and because he hardly spoke to me all the evening."

"What a relief!" remarked Honor, devoutly.

"Not to me," sighed Phoebe; "you know it isn't."

"Yes, I know—I do know," rejoined Honor, pitifully, for how could she help pitying the girl who could perpetually court sympathy for having, unasked and with utter absence of pride, or even self-respect, laid her shallow heart at her guardian's feet? "Yes, I know, Phoebe, and I only thought of myself when I spoke. But I do really believe that some day you will say, with me, that it is a relief when Lawrence does not speak."

"I never should," said Phoebe, with a sigh. "I'm not so surprised that he takes no notice of me when you are here; but when you are away it is worse. He does not talk at all then; he

hardly stays in the room with us. Oh, Honor, I wish I didn't care ! But I do ; and—do you think he will ever be different ?”

“ I hope so, in many ways,” said Honor, sagely ; “ but I think, if it ever came to happen that he offered his love to you, Phoebe, you would see, all at once, that it wasn't worth taking. Has it been very dull for you then, poor little Frau ?”—one of Honor's pet names for her Dutch-visaged cousin.

“ Jane was as cross as she could be,” spoke Phoebe, emphatically ; “ and she said lots of unkind things about your going to Deergrove, till Lawrence stopped her ; he said afterwards she was never to say anything about you before Mr. Slimp.”

“ Oh, he was here—I forgot that !” cried Honor, with a soft little laugh. “ I saw him. I caught a delightful glimpse of him through the half-closed door—sitting so.”

Phoebe laughed—though in a rather spiritless manner—at her cousin's quaint imitation of Mr. Slimp's attitude ; and then Honor turned the subject delicately from that complaint which Phoebe delighted to outpour.

"Stop a moment, Phoebe. Give me time to get down from the bed, and I'll give you a rare representation of Theo's manners to-night; especially of her reception and her farewell."

The ceremony of greeting and speeding a decidedly poor relation—whose part in the scene was of course purely imaginary—was performed with perfect gravity, though its ludicrous side was evident from the laughter which chased away all Phoebe's discontent. Then followed a slight exhibition of Captain Hervey's languid deportment, and the elegant sleepiness which Mrs. Trent could always manage to maintain, undisturbed by the keen watch she kept upon her daughter, and the frequent lessons she vouchsafed to Honor.

Then Honor ceased her acting and took up her candlestick.

"If you and I were rich," mourned Phoebe, plaintively, "and could dress and talk grandly, they would behave quite differently to us, Honor. They wouldn't invite us to Deergrove just on sufferance, one at a time, as they do now when they have a place vacant, to make us small and patronise us, and pretend they are

doing a very noble and compassionate sort of thing to their poor relations."

"That will do, Phœbe. Never mind that old grudge," returned Honor, brightly. "I never let them treat me like a poor relation, and I can often glean a little amusement there."

"I cannot," sighed Phœbe; "they quench me entirely. I always come home miserable, and wishing I was rich and beautiful and admired, that I might pay back Theo for her scornful ways. Honor, do you ever have day-dreams about being rich?"

"Often. Such gorgeous dreams they are, and I'm so beautiful in them, and wear such matchless dresses, and have horses, and carriages, and servants, and a magnificent castle of my own, and I feed all the poor, and have all the sick cured, and everybody idolises me, and I'm presented to the Queen—so," explained Honor, sweeping her muslin skirt along the shabby drugget, in the performance of a wonderful curtsey, "and all the ladies and lords-in-waiting whisper that there never was such a lovely person seen before, even at Court."

"Perhaps they're not allowed to whisper

when the Queen is by," put in Phoebe, her practical nature stumbling here.

"I'm quite certain that the Earl of Essex often whispered," returned the younger girl, with confidence, "and Anne Boleyn was just the one to whisper a great deal when she was a maid-of-honour; and so they whisper in my dreams, and everything is wonderful and beautiful there, Phoebe; but I never care about crowing over Theo—she isn't in the dreams at all."

Phoebe had so thoroughly taught herself to lean upon Honor's deeper, brighter nature that it gave her generally a curious air of dependence and submission to her younger cousin, totally at variance with her superiority in point of years. But there were times when she roused herself to a fleeting priority, on the basis of her freedom from those deceptions encouraged by a disposition so dreamy, credulous, and speculative as her cousin's. At such rare moments she would believe implicitly Jane Haughton's favourite axiom that "Honor had not a grain of sterling common sense," and invest herself abundantly with that oft-misnamed commodity. Such a

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moment followed Honor's soft voice-painting of her childish dream.

"You always go into impossibilities, Honor. I think only of what may be."

Impossibilities! While the white-clad figure, in spite of its dingy background and the scant light thrown upon it, was so purely beautiful! Impossibilities! While the eyes were so full of truth and trust and courage for the time to come, and that time to come was so safely hidden beyond a golden mist made up of possibilities!

"You know Lady Lawrence may leave us a share of her wealth," added Phœbe, apparently aggrieved. "She ought not entirely to forget us girls, and leave it all to Lawrence or Hervey, or even both."

Honor's laugh rang out merrily.

"I am afraid we are all alike," she said, "all building our futures on old Myddelton's money. Oh, what tottering fabrics! But your mentioning Lady Lawrence reminds me of something else, Phœbe. The Abbotsmoor pic-nic is fixed for Thursday, and the photograph, with Abbotsmoor itself as a background, is to be sent to Lady Lawrence in India."

"Oh, how nice!" cried Phoebe, ecstatically. "May we all choose our own postures, and by whom we will stand or sit? What shall I wear? Oh, Honor, I have not any nice dress to go in."

"Have you not?" asked Honor, always such a gentle, helpful receiver of these lugubrious and spasmodic expressions of Phoebe's anxieties respecting her wardrobe and the deficiencies therein. "How is that? I thought we should wear the dresses we had for the bazaar at Somerson Park."

"You can; yours looks all right," whined Phoebe; "and of course you will, because everybody said that it suited you; but I cannot. Mine is as torn, and as soiled, and as shabby as ever it can be, and I'm sure I would not disgrace myself by putting it on."

Phoebe had risen in her excitement, and taken the dress from its drawer, and now she threw it contemptuously on the bed before Honor.

"It was very pretty at first, I know," she said, "and no one would believe you had done all the planning and trimming, for they looked like French dresses. But you must

own, Honor, that I could not wear it now."

"If you like," said Honor, slowly, not questioning Phoebe's right to have spoiled the dress while her own—bought, and made, and worn at the same time—was fresh and unsoiled, "if you like, Phoebe, we will wear our black silks."

"Black silks at a pic-nic!" exclaimed Phoebe. "No indeed. But it was a kind offer of yours, Honor," she added, remorsefully "for your dress is almost as good as new, and you look so lovely in it. But I'll tell you what you might do"—this in a tone of anxious coaxing—"you might get Lawrence to give us money for a new one each. Tell him how we have not five shillings left of this quarter's allowance. He will not refuse you, Honor."

"I would go in my very oldest dress sooner than ask for a new one from him," returned the younger girl; "I always keep within my allowance for that very reason."

Phoebe's eyes filled; they were gentle, rather prominent, light gray eyes, with a fountain very near them; but still these ready tears had always the same effect upon Honor; and when Phoebe said ruefully, "He would not

give it me, or I would ask for myself; but he never refuses you," she kissed her quietly, and said she would ask their guardian for the dress, and did not blame her, by one word, for the selfish use she made of her guardian's favourite.

"I shall sleep comfortably now," observed Phœbe, shaking up her pillow. "Good night, Honor dear; though you have not told me much about Deergrove. Was there no guest but yourself?"

"Only one," said Honor, from the open doorway; "but—go to sleep, Phœbe."

"For," added the girl to herself, as she closed the bed-room door behind her, "if I speak or think again of that other guest, my thoughts will go off once more to Gabriel Myddelton and that often-told story which I heard again to-night. How plain it was that Mr. Keith saw no way of accounting for the murder but by Gabriel's having committed it! How curiously he asked if a doubt had *ever* been entertained as to Gabriel's guilt, and no one could say 'Yes'!"

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Next morning, from a feverish dream in which

old Myddelton was murdering Mr. Keith, and she and Gabriel—just as he might have walked out of the picture at Abbotsmoor—stood looking on, Honor was roused by the clanging of the shrill bell which was wont, at eight o'clock A.M., to summon the occupants of The Larches to break their fast upon the sternly simple viands which Miss Haughton's ingenuity and economy had suggested.

"Late again," remarked that lady, as Honor entered the breakfast-room half an hour afterwards, sweet and fresh as a summer rose on which the dew-drops sparkle, and with that clear light within her eyes which could not have shone there if the soul behind had not been free from taint of vanity or selfishness.

Mr. Haughton halfrose from his seat as Honor came up to the table, but, with a sudden change of purpose, he drew his chair closer, and began to carve the cold meat pie before him.

His sister passed by the girl's bright "good morning," and poured out her tea with a rigid displeasure stamping every feature. Jane Haughton was certainly not one of those whose presence at any time makes sunshine in a

house. Hers had, on the contrary, rather the effect of February sleet or a November fog ; but in the early morning this was peculiarly noticeable.

“A real wet blanket,” Honor thought, as she took her cup from Jane’s hand, “would have a far more soothing.”

Conversation at The Larches was never very warm and general, especially at breakfast ; but certainly this morning, as on many another morning, Honor tried her best to make it so. She chatted of her visit last night, and described the dinner to Jane, undeterred by that lady’s stoniness of aspect. She gave Phœbe an account of the dresses, the new books she had seen, and the new duet she had heard, undisturbed by Phœbe’s distracted attention and surreptitious signs to her not to forget her promise ; and she retailed to Lawrence the chief points of the conversation.

“That other guest,” remarked Mr. Haughton, “must have been vastly edified by so much talk of old Myddelton and his connections, especially after the speech I heard old Mrs. Payte make to him a day or two ago.”

"What was that?"

"She said old Myddelton's relations could be nothing but money-loving and cowardly."

"Oh, what a falsehood and a shame!" cried Phœbe, always ready to reply to him. "Suppose she knew you had overheard that, Lawrence?"

"I believe she did know," he answered, carelessly, "*she* does not care who overhears her sour speeches."

"What did Mr. Keith say?" inquired Jane.

"Do you suppose I cared to listen?"

"It must be satisfactory to him," said Honor, quietly, "to feel that he has not been deceived in his estimate of us. There is plenty of cowardice and love of money among us."

"There may be these qualities among us," replied Lawrence, looking into the girl's eyes, "but there is neither of them in you, Honor."

"They belong to the very name of Myddelton," returned Honor, with a hot, vexed blush, for nothing distressed her more than such a speech from him in presence of his sister and poor little Phœbe, "and he sees how we all hate each other in our hearts, and he knows we

shall hate each other until Lady Lawrence's will is read, when we shall immediately concentrate all our hatred upon her heir."

"It's all Gabriel Myddelton's fault," sighed Phoebe, "that these dreadful things are laid to our charge; but, Honor, you know very well that it is only the Trents who hate——"

Phoebe broke off abruptly in her speech, for Mr. Haughton had left the room, and she had something far more important to urge upon Honor than any want of affection in the Trents.

"Go now," she whispered across the table, "remember your promise, Honor."

Honor put her chair back into its place against the wall—according to one of Jane's most strictly enforced lessons—and left the room too.

In the hall, as she paused in her extreme unwillingness to enter Lawrence's study, Phoebe rushed out to her, almost breathless in her eagerness.

"Make haste, Honor," she cried, pushing her cousin towards the door of Mr. Haughton's study, "he may go off in a hurry. Why should you dawdle when you know he will do it for you? This is too unkind of you, Honor."

"Take your hands away; leave me to open the door myself," said Honor, with a quick catch of her breath, "I will not be dragged to do what I have—promised."

When Honor entered the room, her guardian was locking the drawers of his writing-table. He had taken the key from the last, and put the bunch into his pocket, before he saw her, or heard her quiet tread. Then he stepped back to the chimney-piece, and looked at her with a pleased smile—quite willing, evidently, that she should detain him as long as she chose.

"Please, Lawrence," the girl began, simply, "will you let Phoebe have a little money this morning?"

"No. I have told Phoebe a hundred times that, if I go on permitting her to overdraw her allowance, she will grow more and more extravagant, and will not be able to extricate herself."

Honor could not see that this impatient retort was chiefly evoked by his sudden disappointment in finding that it was for some one else's sake that she had sought him; she only saw that he looked firm in his refusal.

"I have told her this a hundred times," he repeated; "and I will not trouble myself to tell her again. She is absurd and wasteful in her expenditure. Tell her to do as you do; you have the same allowance, and you always look——"

"Jane says if there were another person in the house like me she should be driven wild."

"A pretty safe speech," sneered Lawrence, "the *if* is a huge one. Jane's reason for the feeling, poor old girl, is not inscrutable, though. You forgive those speeches, Honor," he added, in another tone, "when you remember how jealously she guards my affection? You can understand why she is harder to you than to Phoebe? She is not afraid of Phoebe's ever supplanting——"

"Phoebe is a great deal smaller than Jane, why should Jane be afraid?"

"Laughing, always laughing," muttered Mr Houghton. "Is life to be all a jest for you?"

A soft, quick shadow fell upon the girl's face.

She was but eighteen, and an orphan. Into no mother's listening ear and loving heart could she whisper the doubts, and hopes, and longings which troubled or cheered her. Upon no father's arm had she lent through all her girlhood; no father's strong and steadfast love had guided and taught her. And beyond! What awaited this girl whose generous aims and impulses were all thrown back upon herself in this cramped home? What awaited her beyond? Was life to be all a jest? No wonder that such a swift, sad shadow fell upon her face like a foreboding.

"Let Jane say what she will, Honor," spoke Lawrence, extending his hand to her. "You shall be denied nothing while I am master here."

"I was not thinking of Jane's speech," she said, rousing herself from that moment's inexplicable sadness, and moving a little back from the outstretched hand. "Will you give Phoebe the money, please, Lawrence?"

"No," he answered, angrily, but very slowly, as he gazed into her face; "but I will give it to you if you like."

"I do not want it," began Honor, in haste,

but he went on after her interruption, as if he had not hesitated.

“You may do as you like with it, of course; spend it for Phœbe, if you choose, or give it to her to spend. I do not care what is done with it afterwards. How much is it to be? Is this enough?”

He had taken two sovereigns from his purse, but he held the purse still open.

“Phœbe only wished for one,” said Honor, in her proud, quiet tones.

“I did not ask Phœbe,” returned Mr. Haughton, closing the purse, and once more holding his hand towards Honor, with the money in it; “take them, Honor. Of course Phœbe bade you ask, but, come at whose bidding you will, you know that I never could refuse a request of yours. Some day, perhaps, the favours you come to ask will be for yourself, as they used to be in old times. Take it. Why do you wait so long?”

Slowly and daintily, with barely a touch of her soft white fingers, she took the gold coins from his palm.

“Thank you, Cousin Lawrence.”

"*Cousin* Lawrence!" he echoed, angrily. "You are skilled in wounding, Honor, and I am a stone, of course, and cannot feel or see. I am not supposed to know that you avoid touching my hand, when you do it with such gentle grace. I am not supposed to know that you shrink from any obligation to me, when you thank me so prettily. Cousin! Bah! that one word is hateful to me from your lips."

"Is it?" asked Honor, gravely. "Would you have me say *Uncle* Lawrence? Would this sound better—Thank you, Uncle Lawrence?"

"Is that all the payment you will give me?" inquired Mr. Haughton, his anger giving way to amusement, as it generally did when he talked with her.

"Yes, that is all," she answered, speaking to him just as she used to do when she was a child, and had not learned the secret of why it was she to whom he always listened, and she whose company he always sought. "Phoebe will repay her own debts."

"I want no thanks from Phoebe," he interrupted, moodily. "Let her have her ribbons and flowers and foolery, and be content. Do not

send her with her gushing thanks to me. What is it? What makes you look so hurt and proud? The old story, eh, of my duty to Phoebe as her guardian—of my unkindness—of her wasted affection, may be? I do not know; I am not to blame in the matter; *you* can testify to that, Honor. Do not turn away. Listen for one moment, my little favourite. You can set everything straight. Phoebe shall have what she likes, dresses and feathers to satiety—anything, if you will give me what I want.”

“I could not, Cousin Lawrence,” said Honor, with a demure shake of the head, “because what you want is a contented mind.”

Then she gave him her bright little daring nod, and, leaving him, ran upstairs with the news for which Phoebe was so anxiously waiting.

“We’ll walk into Kinbury this afternoon and buy the dress,” exclaimed Phoebe, in a rapture of delight, “and we shall be able to make it ourselves to-morrow, and so can spend all the extra money on trimmings.”

“Yes,” said Honor, kindly, knowing on whom the cutting and the trimming and the chief

work would fall; "yes, we can do it to-morrow, and have it all ready for Thursday morning; and on our way home this afternoon we will call at East Cottage. Now I am going to see if I can help Jane."

CHAPTER VI.

She doeth little kindnesses,
Which most leave undone or despise ;
For nought that sets one's heart at ease,
And giveth happiness or peace,
Is low-esteemèd in her eyes.

LOWELL.

WHEN Miss Owen's all-important purchases were made, Honor made one which excited Phoebe's curiosity amazingly. Yet it was only a packet of wools of various shades and colours, and a roll of fine canvas.

"Why carry it?" Phoebe asked, as Honor took this parcel in her hand. "Let it be sent with the other things."

"No," whispered Honor. "It is not large enough to be inconvenient—I wish it were."

On their way home, the girls stopped before a low white cottage standing in a long garden where flowers, fruits, and vegetables grew promiscuously.

"Oh! do not go in here," exclaimed Phoebe, pettishly. "Mrs. Payte is such a disagreeable old woman, and Mrs. Disbrowe so dull and depressing. Come along, Honor; they haven't seen us."

Honor had unfastened the gate by this time.

"If you wish to walk on, Phoebe, do," she said; "and I will overtake you."

But Phoebe had no wish to walk on by herself, and, moreover, the thought struck her that, if they loitered here, perhaps Lawrence might overtake them on his way home from his office. So she followed Honor up the garden path.

A small, sharp-faced old lady, in a broad-brimmed hat and leather gloves, stood on the gravel path before the cottage windows, leaning on a garden hoe, which looked heavy and cumbersome in the tiny hands of this small old lady. Her bright, shrewd eyes shone steadily from under the brim of her ugly brown hat as she watched the girls coming; but her thin lips broke into no smile of welcome, and she advanced no step to meet her visitors.

Behind her, at the open window of the cottage parlour, sat another lady, totally different

in appearance, though probably of the same age. Both were widows; yet, while Mrs. Disbrowe wore the dress which belongs to lifelong widowhood, little Mrs. Payte had decked herself in an inartistic combination of colours. Both were at least seventy years of age; yet, while Mrs. Disbrowe lay in her large chair, calm and tranquil, as sweet old age should be, and with the soft white hair and patient eyes which a sweet old age should wear, Mrs. Payte's small figure stood firm and erect, and her keen, quick eyes and mobile features had still the restlessness and strength of youth.

It needed no second glance to tell that the government of East Cottage was on the shoulders of the smaller lady, and that the invalid sitting at the window in the September sunshine was fully and humbly aware of this. The old ladies had not been particularly reticent about their private or personal affairs; so it was no secret in the village that the rooms at East Cottage had been taken not only to benefit Mrs. Disbrowe's health, but because Mrs. Payte found it convenient to stay here at present to economise. It was on that very subject that

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Mrs. Payte was speaking to her friend, when the garden gate opened to admit the girls.

"We have been here nearly two months," she was saying, "and I don't see any improvement in your health, Selina; indeed, I think you lie down more than ever; and I'm sure, on such a morning as this"—Honor was near enough now for her quick young ears to catch every word—"you might very well exert yourself a little. I hate to see people giving themselves over to thorough indolence. Here's Honor Craven—she'll tell you how pleasant it is out of doors."

"It is quite as pleasant at the open window, Mrs. Disbrowe," said Honor, with a gentle smile into the patient's worn face, as she went up to the window and took the invalid's hand—"quite as pleasant"—this with a little emphasis, half in fun and half in earnest, as she turned again to shake the leather-gloved hand which Mrs. Payte extended leisurely.

"I'm very poorly myself," asserted the small old lady, with a defiant expression in every feature which the brown hat shaded; "only no one ever notices. As for Selina, she never

thinks anyone suffers but herself; and she—why, she sleeps all night like a top, and I may toss and sigh, and she hears nothing of it. If I could sleep as she does, I wouldn't call myself ill. Dear me, Honor, you need not look at her in that sort of sickeningly compassionate way. If she could hear every word, it would not hurt her, but she cannot. She gets deafer every day, and only hears me when I shout at the top of my voice. You needn't be afraid of hurting *her*. Do you wonder that my patience is exhausted, when you see how lackadaisical she is—eh, Phœbe?"

"Indeed I do not," said Phœbe; for of course it was easier and wiser to concur with the sharp-tempered old lady, when Phœbe knew the invalid could not hear.

"You know very well how worried I am with her, and how my patience is tried—don't you, Honor?"

"I see how *her* patience is tried, Mrs. Payte," the girl said, softly. "To lighten her suffering, if that were possible, or ease the tedium of her days, could hardly be worry for anyone to whom the opportunity is given."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the old lady, shrilly. "One would think you envied me the pleasant occupation."

"I think I do," said Honor, thoughtfully; "I so often and often think of her—how she is suffering hour after hour without hope of ease, yet without complaint, and I do so long to be able to do something to make the pain more bearable."

"I verily believe you mean it," was the slow retort, as Mrs. Edna Payte looked with keen scrutiny into the girl's earnest face; "you look as if you did. Well, we shall soon see how hollow that idea is, for I give you leave from this moment to take what share you will of this tedious and enervating occupation. There—now you won't make that speech again, I fancy."

"May I come when I like?" inquired Honor, earnestly. "May I do whatever I can, to cheer her or relieve her? May I really, Mrs. Payte?"

"You may do whatever you choose," returned the old lady, with complacent contempt; "we shall soon see how little that will be, now the way is clear for you. We are all anxious

enough to walk up the 'straight and thorny path to heaven' so long as we cannot find it; but as soon as ever it lies there right before our eyes, like the side of a precipice covered with briars, why, then we sneak back again, and leave off talking about it. Well," after a pause, "why don't you contradict me, child, and say how sure you are that you can tread safely among the adders, and the tangles, and the pitfalls?"

"I dare not," said the girl softly; "but you will not take back your promise?"

"Not yet," replied the old lady, smiling cynically into Honor's beautiful earnest eyes; "I shall wait till I see the ashes of all your high-flown resolutions. There, that's enough of such nonsense. What's the news in Kinbury, girls?"

This was one of Mrs. Payte's unvarying questions, and Phoebe was prepared for it, and took a keen enjoyment in pouring into such willing ears all that she could tell of small news—the only giant among the items being the description of her new dress.

"Whose taste was it?" inquired Mrs. Payte,

curtly, and Phoebe eagerly appropriated the credit, confessing, though without any malice, that indeed Honor wanted her not to have the fashionable mixture of pink and blue.

"If it is the fashion, have it," remarked Mrs. Payte, with terseness. "What is Honor's taste compared with fashion?"

"So I said," exclaimed Phoebe, delighted; "and I do not see why one should dress dowdily at a pic-nic, though I'm sure I do not want to vex Honor, because she's going to help me to make it."

"Certainly, don't vex her—for your own sake," advised the old lady, in those four last words hitting carelessly upon the main-spring of Phoebe's character.

"Is your allowance greater than Honor's, Phoebe?" inquired Mrs. Disbrowe, when the chief points of conversation became apparent to her.

"No, we have the same."

"Then I'm afraid you will always be behind-hand, and always wanting help," was the quiet reply; "for don't you remember what George

Herbert says, 'Who cannot live on twentie poundes a yeare cannot on fortie'?"

"That's nonsense, of course," said Phoebe, "and it is not many girls who have to dress on forty pounds a year, as we have."

"Never mind," put in Mrs. Payte, encouragingly; "you may be rich enough some day, so it is worth while running short now. Have you heard anything lately from Lady Lawrence?"

"Yes," cried Phoebe, eagerly; "she is to be in England before Christmas, and we are all to meet her in London. She is preparing now to leave Calcutta."

"That's right," remarked Mrs. Payte, with an air of real anticipation. "I've a great wish to see this sister of old Myddelton's, and I may have a chance, if she comes to England. I like to come across a thoroughly wicked old woman."

"Is Lady Lawrence a thoroughly wicked old woman?" inquired Honor, laughing.

"Of course, being old Myddelton's sister and Gabriel's aunt. But you girls mustn't think of that. You must look upon her as a goddess or angel, whichever you like. Remember, she has

a million to will away, as well as landed estates and princely incomes. You write affectionate epistles to her, eh ?”

“I write every month,” said Phoebe ; “ we all do. I dare say the Trents write oftener, and I am sure Lawrence does, but she never writes back, though she sent us her picture. She’s a very grand and clever-looking person, enormously stout, and with smooth, dark hair.”

“ Mean people are always stout and clever,” remarked Mrs. Payte, sententiously. “ Do you write to her, Honor ?”

“ I have not lately,” the girl answered, her eyes far off upon a horseman coming slowly along the turnpike road towards Kinbury. “ I did when I was a child, just as the others do, for Lawrence ordered it, but I don’t now.”

“ A bad result of being your own mistress,” grumbled Mrs. Payte. “ Why was it ?”

“ She never answered our letters,” Honor said. “ She did not care for us ; so how can we care for her ?”

“ The others do, don’t they ?”

Phoebe laughed.

“ Care for her ? why, of course not, Mrs.

Payte. We're only all trying to make ourselves agreeable to her."

"To be sure—that's what I mean. Most natural it is, and Honor should not hold herself aloof? Well, it isn't too late yet, that's one good thing. Take my advice, and write her a long, flattering, fond letter. Don't think about whether you really love her or not—that's not the question. She has money to leave to some of you, and, without caring a button about her, you may ingratiate yourselves. Young people seldom care much in reality about old women, and a little pretence is fair enough in such a case as this."

"That's what I say, and all of us," assented Phoebe, with a ready burst of heavy laughter, "all but Honor."

"All the same, Honor must own it is true, if she has any honesty at all," persisted the old lady, taking off her hat for a moment to smooth her small gray curls, and looking, the while, into Honor's face with ironical scrutiny.

"No; I do not own it, Mrs. Payte," the girl said, shaking her head with her pretty, gentle smile. "I do not own that pretence is fair,

and I do not own that young people do not care for old women."

"Well, I've seen more than you have, and I've a right to say it. Who is this?"

The abrupt question made the invalid start, and Honor looked round to see the cause of it. At the cottage gate, stood the horseman whom, a few moments ago, she had been watching. He dismounted, fastened his horse to the gate, and then walked leisurely down the narrow path, three dogs following closely at his heels, evidently aware that they were not to go beyond the little box-border.

"You've been riding a long way, Mr. Keith," began Mrs. Payte, with her usual abruptness, when he offered her his hand.

"Forty miles at least since daybreak," was the brief reply. But Mrs. Payte, without exactly knowing why, considered it a stumbling-block in the way of further questioning. She went through an elaborate ceremony in her introduction of Phoebe, and then turned to repeat it for Honor's benefit; but, to her surprise, she found Mr. Keith and Honor shaking hands.

One minute afterwards Honor had slipped away. Feeling that her presence would not be missed just then, she went to perform one errand on which her mind was bent, and which she always did perform in her visits to East Cottage. Hurrying round to the back-door, she entered a small kitchen, neat but barely furnished, in which a young woman sat sewing near the lattice window, a heavy pair of crutches beside her chair.

"Alone, Marie?" questioned Honor, coming softly up to the chair and leaning over it.

"Yes, alone, Miss Craven," said the sick girl, her pale face brightening unspeakably as she raised it to the beautiful one above her. "The lady's servant is sitting in the front kitchen; she always does. She says this one feels like a well, and—and, as they pay for it, she has the right to sit there."

"And have you given up the right to sit there too, Marie?"

"Oh yes, Miss Craven; they pay for those rooms. But I do very well here."

"Marie, you remember telling me that you thought you could get a little money by design-

ing for woolwork, but could only do it by working the pattern, not by drawing. Well, see here."

The parcel was brought from Honor's pocket, and the two girls' heads bent over its contents—the beautiful face whose suffering was all to come, and the worn one whose bitterest suffering was past.

For nearly half an hour, Honor Craven sat in the little back-kitchen, cheering, by that half-hour, the girl's whole day, and giving her pleasant thoughts and memories to last her till the next time the bright voice should greet her from the open doorway. Then she rose to go.

"I am coming here oftener now, Marie," she said, giving her gentle little hand to the lame girl, as she would have done to any lady in the land. "I suppose your father will soon be in. You will not be alone much longer. How is he getting on, Marie?"

"About the same, Miss Craven," replied the girl, feeling the reality of Honor's interest. "He has an order for the photograph at Abbotsmoor on Thursday, but he took only one

likeness yesterday, and his room in Kinbury is expensive. Poor father!"


"Oh, he will soon get better now, Marie; never fear. I'm so glad it is he who is to take us at Abbotsmoor."

"It is through Sir Philip Somerson. I do not think Mrs. Trent would ever have thought of it. And father says Mr. Keith has ordered a picture, but whether that's through Sir Philip or not, he doesn't know."

It was of the old photographer that they were talking in the garden, when Honor joined them again, and found Royden Keith leaning against the open window beside which Mrs. Disbrowe lay, and Mrs. Payte and Phoebe sitting on the garden-seat without.

"It is a stupid idea altogether, I think," the little old lady was saying, when Honor came quietly up and stood among them. "How can you have the picture complete without having Gabriel Myddelton in it, and who would care for a picture where *he* figured? Rubbish altogether I call it, and Lady Lawrence is a senseless old woman to want it."

"Perhaps it would be possible," said Royden,



with the flash of keen amusement which sometimes shone so swiftly in his steadfast, handsome eyes, "for Verrien to copy Gabriel Myddelton's picture first, and then arrange the head among the others, that the photograph might include him too."

"None of the others would sit in that case," observed Mrs. Payte, tersely.

"Why? Cowardice was his inheritance, not an acquired fault. What is your crest, Miss Craven?"

"A pair of heels," said Honor, smiling a little at her own inexplicable blush, as she owned to the inheritance "and the motto below is from the *Musarum Deliciæ*. You know the lines—

'He that fights and runs away,
May live to fight another day.'

"The inheritance of cowardice," said Royden, smiling into her eyes. "And Gabriel's mother was a Craven. What is the legend of the crest?"

"Our earliest ancestor," said Honor, "once engaged in single combat, and when he found the fight going against him, saved his life in a paltry manner by crying 'Craven' before the

sun went down. Knights were allowed, in those days, to end the fight so, to their dishonour."

"I call it a wise and prudent measure too," said Royden, laughing, as he turned to the sick lady within the room; "there are worse crimes in the world than crying 'Craven' before the sun goes down. Don't you think so, Mrs. Disbrowe?"

"Indeed I do," she answered, gently smiling as she met his gaze. ("It is a gaze I like to meet," she had said to Mrs. Payte only that very morning, as they talked of Royden Keith.) "I wish I thought that was poor young Myddelton's only sin."

"He was a Myddelton. How could you expect him to be other than what he proved himself?" interrupted Mrs. Payte, contemptuously. "If he ever could turn out a good man, it would be now that he has forfeited his name and his riches. The hope of stepping into such a fortune has made others sin besides Gabriel Myddelton, and *is* making others sin, and *will* make others sin; and the possession of such wealth would spoil many a man, and woman

too. It is beyond my power to imagine whom it would *not* spoil."

The sharp eyes under the broad hat went from Honor's face to Phoebe's and back again to Honor's, Mr. Keith following their gaze, still leaning idly there against the window, with the three dogs waiting at his feet.

It was the little old lady herself who broke the pause which followed her last words.


"I have a great wish to go to Abbotsmoor. I suppose I must pocket my pride and ask for an invitation."

"Will you go in my place, Mrs. Payte," cried Honor, impulsively, "and let me stay with Mrs. Disbrowe?"

"Now, Honor, how can you be so silly?" explained Phoebe. "You know how angry Lawrence would be."

"Will you," said Royden, turning his eyes quickly from Honor's vexed face, "let me drive you there, Mrs. Payte? I am invited to bring a friend; please to be that friend."

There was a little blunt demurring, but it was arranged nevertheless, and the old lady seemed as well contented as she ever seemed about anything.



They chatted a little longer, and then Royden prepared to go.

"What a beautiful fellow this greyhound is!" said Honor, laying her hand lightly on the glossy, dun-coloured head. "What is his name, Mr. Keith?"

"Lachne," he answered, as he offered her his hand; "that means the glossy-coated: and this little terrier is Leucos, which means grey; and this spaniel, Labro, which means furious. Can you remember after whose dogs mine are named?"

"Yes—Actæon's," she answered. "Have you fifty?"

"Only these three now," he said, rather gravely; "trusty old friends, whom I have had with me many years."

"And from whom you would not like to part, especially this beautiful greyhound?"

"No; I do not know what would tempt me voluntarily to part with Lachne.

From East Cottage, Royden Keith rode on into Kinbury, and, dismounting at the door of the hotel, gave his horse to his groom.

"She is tired enough," he said; "take her in,

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From the Cottage, Royden Keith rode on into the park, dismounting at the door of the house to his groom.

"Take her in," he said; "take her in,

Edwards, and bring me round Robin Hood in half-an-hour's time."

"Saddled, sir?" inquired the groom, betraying a little of his astonishment; for had not his master been in the saddle almost since daybreak?

"Saddled, of course," returned Royden, as he mounted the hotel steps.

"I did not expect you back so soon, sir," said Pierce, following Mr. Keith to his private sitting-room; "you ordered dinner at eight. Will you lunch so late as this, sir?"

"I lunched three hours ago," said Royden, as he took his letters from the chimney-piece, with his back to the valet, who seemed stirred a little from his usual middle-aged gravity. "I lunched at the Towers. Send me a glass of wine, that is all."

Following the waiter, who, with the mathematical precision of waiters, set the wine and biscuits before Mr. Keith, came Pierce once more into his master's presence.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, making a show of removing the things from the table, "but are all well at The Towers?"

"All well, thank you, Pierce."

"And everything going on as it should do, sir—as it would if you were there?"

"Just as it would if we were there," amended Royden, smiling at the man's real, though hidden, earnestness.

"You seemed to be summoned so hurriedly, sir, I thought."

"Not summoned at all," said Mr. Keith, as he poured himself a glass of sherry.

"No illness of—the lady's, sir?"

"No."

Royden put down his empty glass and took up another letter. The servant lingered still, but the solemn decorum of his face and manner hid the keen and anxious interest he felt in his master's answers.

"Leave those, Pierce," said Royden, looking up from the paper in his hand; "I am going out again in a few minutes."

"Riding again this evening, sir?"

"Riding again this evening—yes," he answered, smiling a little now. "But I am only going round the Abbotsmoor woods, and shall be back to dinner. Poor Princess is tired out, but Robin will be fresh and fleet."

"The dogs seem tired too, sir," said Pierce, wondering at the run their master had given them that day.

"Then they need not come ; they shall make their own choice. N-o," mused Royden, slowly tearing the letter in his hand ; "I will take Lachne only."

Pierce looked in vain for any apparent reason for this change of purpose.

"To save trouble, I suppose," he thought. "There's always a scene if he tries to leave the greyhound behind."

So Royden Keith, ten minutes afterwards, rode from Kinbury to find the answer to that doubt he had expressed at East Cottage—

"I do not know what would tempt me voluntarily to part with Lachne."

CHAPTER VII.

"The Count is neither sad, nor sick, nor merry, nor well; but civil, Count; civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion."

Much Ado About Nothing.

MRS. PAYTE stood with the girls at the gate of East Cottage, watching Royden as he rode away.

"Do you like him, Phoebe?" she asked, abruptly.

"He is very handsome," Phoebe acknowledged, in a tone of praise as warm as she ever bestowed on anyone save her guardian.

"*He's* not a man to go through life with his hands folded," remarked the old lady tersely. "Honor, why are you staring up the road? You won't call him handsome, I know—not you. Unless a man has languishing manners

like Captain Trent's, and can look at you lackadaisically under his eyelids, and talk in a lazy whisper, *you* haven't much to say in his favour, Ah, I see why you were staring; here they come! Sound the trumpet, beat the drum! What a delightful conjunction! They remind me of Prior and Swift, who used to walk round the parks together—Prior to make himself fat; Swift to keep himself lean."

Honor's eyes had to come back from their distant gaze to see the two advancing figures, and then she turned to Phoebe with a smile.

"I declare I did not know," said the old lady, "that Lawrence Haughton and Hervey Trent were such close friends. What bond of union lies between them?"

"It must have been Hervey who joined Lawrence on the road," suggested Phoebe, "for I'm sure Lawrence would not overtake and join Hervey of his own accord."

"And pray why not?" inquired Mrs. Payte, sharply. "Would not Mr. Haughton like to be the means of benefiting a young man whose mind is peculiarly alive to good influences?"

Phoebe looked into the old lady's face,

astonished, but never for more than a minute at a time did she trouble herself to study Mrs. Payte's moods.

The gentlemen came up to the gate just then, and stopped, with a look of pleasure as well as surprise: but, after that first moment, Honor could see that Lawrence was in one of his moods of smothered ill-humour.

"Walking home, are you?" said the old lady, her shrewd glance impeded by the brim of her ugly brown hat. "What enterprise! But I must stop you here. Look upon East Cottage as a half-way house—the traveller's rest—and when you leave, I will let you take your wards with you, Mr. Haughton. Now, Honor, run and order the tea-table to be brought out."

There was no hesitation in Hervey's mind about accepting this invitation, and, though Lawrence paused for a moment, he did not refuse.

"I like to have young people round me," observed Mrs. Payte, particularly addressing Hervey, as he threw himself languidly on the garden-seat; "it gives me life and vigour. As one grows old and feeble, one likes to study

enviously the strength and energy of youth."

"Does one, Mrs. Payte?" inquired Captain Hervey, politely, as his lazy eyes rested on the small, wiry form before him. "I should have thought it would have bored one."

"Mr. Haughton, you must not bring your business face here, please; we do not want to make our wills, or draw up our marriage settlements—quite yet. We only want to fritter away an hour in nonsensical tea-drinking. Stupid, don't you think?"

"One wasted hour cannot signify very much," the lawyer answered, indifferently.

"Perhaps not, only the difficulty to me is to determine which of our hours *are* wasted. Now, Selina?"

Mrs. Disbrowe rose from her seat in the window, for Honor had come for her, and had brought Hervey to carry the easy chair. Mrs. Payte stopped in her own occupation to watch this proceeding, but afterwards made up for the lost time by extra snapping.

"She says she likes to have young people about her," fretted Miss Owen aside to her cousin; "if so, why is she so cross?"

"Now, girls," cried the little old lady from her seat, "we are waiting for you. Go to your separate trays—Honor to the coffee, and you, Phoebe, to the tea. There will be a knight for each of you."

Mrs. Payte leaned back in her seat after this speech, and waited for the division of labour, watching almost as if she had an interest in it, beyond what Theodora Trent called her "unwarrantable interference in everything."

"Hervey," said Honor, simply, "will you please to wait upon me?"

The sharp eyes under the brown hat went swiftly up to Lawrence Haughton's face, and the thin lips of this cross old lady stirred just a little at their corners.

"Mr. Haughton, I patronise your end of the table, and Phoebe's tea. I look upon coffee as a lingering poison for a bilious constitution like mine. Your vaunted air has done me no good so far."

Honor glanced at the real invalid, who never spoke of her ailments, and grew even more gentle in her attentions.

"Hervey," she said, "did not Mrs. Trent tell

us last night that Lady Lawrence said Kinbury air would kill her?"

"I dare say," assented Hervey, languidly. "I rarely recollect what she says."

"In that particular matter, Lady Lawrence's opinion entirely coincides with mine, then," said the old lady, smiling graciously in answer to Hervey's words, "though in other respects I fail to learn any good of her. You are more privileged, I presume; you are sure to hear the best points of her character."

"Then I should like to be told which are the worst," observed Mr. Haughton, bluntly.

"I suppose, Mr. Haughton," mused the old lady, as she sipped her tea, "that it is you who have the greater chance of her favour; you are so clever, and so well understand the value of money."

"It would be rather a dangerous thing for you, Lawrence," said Honor, when he turned to her. "Don't you remember Little, the miser? He saved forty thousand pounds, and when at last the doctor told him he must spend a little and take wine, he died in the act of drawing the first cork. How much better it would have

been if he'd gone on saving, and left the wine alone!"

"You are a ridiculous child," snapped Mrs. Payte. "Mr. Haughton, will you kindly bring me another cup of tea from Phoebe?"

Phoebe had been gazing regretfully into his angry face, and perhaps the little old lady had noticed this. When tea was over, and Honor was again enlisting Hervey's aid for the invalid, Mrs. Payte managed to keep Lawrence on the seat beside her. Phoebe hovered about for a time, but she was so very coolly and persistently kept at arm's length that she was obliged to fall back and join Honor and Mrs. Disbrowe in the sitting-room.

"Captain Trent is exerting himself unusually," observed Mrs. Payte. "I suppose he will presently exert himself sufficiently to marry."

"I suppose so."

"Theodora Trent will make him an excellent wife," she continued, pushing her hat back a little, and smoothing her tiny gray curls, "and a stylish wife, which is all-important. That being the case, and their marriage a settled thing, I don't like to see him dancing attend-

ance—I mean sauntering attendance—on Honor Craven.”

A flame of fiercest scarlet rushed into Lawrence Haughton's face.

“And I am afraid,” resumed the old lady, placidly, “that the day of Hervey's marriage will be a heavy day for you. I have heard that Miss Trent is always received at The Larches with open arms.”

“Pray whose arms open to receive her?” inquired Lawrence, with undisguised scorn.

“Miss Haughton's, and, they say, Mr. Haughton's too; though he would not confess it for a thousand pounds.”

“Why should I lie for a thousand pounds?”

“This is only what I have heard,” explained the old lady, apparently anxious to impress this fact upon him; “you will excuse my mentioning it.”

He bowed a sulky acceptance of her apology.

“There is no preventing idiotic things being said,” he muttered. “I never believe a word I hear.”

“Nor do I,” returned the old lady, soothingly, “not a word; and I know that some day I shall


have the pleasure of offering my congratulations on your marriage with Phœbe Owen—a nice, lively girl, with plenty of smiles and agreeable sayings. I suppose, in the event of your inheriting old Myddelton's money, you would sell your practice, Mr. Haughton?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Payte had just answered by a smile full of sympathy, when the garden gate swung upon its hinges, and a cheery voice saluted the party.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Romer," called Mrs. Payte, in her brisk, shrill tones, "for my young visitors were just leaving me."

The Reverend Walter Romer, Rector of Statton (the village to which Deergrove and The Larches and East Cottage belonged), was a cordial, hearty old gentleman, who equally enjoyed tending his spiritual flock and farming his arable land; a practical farmer as well as a practical Christian; a man with a clear business head and a warm unselfish heart; a man at once shrewd and frank; at once provident and generous; worldly in just those varied senses of the word in which it is safe for a good



and upright pastor to be worldly, while this is the world in which his help is needed.

"I understood from my old clerk," he said, after his warm greeting all round, "that Mr. Keith was here."

"He only stopped for a few minutes as he rode past," explained Mrs. Payte, while more than one present noticed the frown gathering on Lawrence Haughton's brow. "What do you want with him, Mr. Romer? Wasn't he at church last Sunday?"

"Probably somewhere," returned the Rector, laughing, "listening to a better fellow than myself. No; the fact is, he was to have come out to-day for some fishing, and I wanted to ask what had prevented him. There was a freshet this morning of a couple of feet down the river, and I'm vexed he missed his sport."

"Are you?" questioned Mrs. Payte, in her quickest tones. "Do you mean to say now, Mr. Romer, that you understand that man?"

"Well, he emphatically does not wear his heart upon his sleeve. And yet I think——"

"What, Mr. Romer?"

It was Honor who put in the question gently, when he paused.

"That there is no inconsistency in his wearing the motto which belongs to his branch of the Keith family—*I own no nobility but the soul*—nobility enough, eh, Miss Honor?"

"Excuse me," put in the lawyer, chillily, "but how have you discovered his branch of the family, if, as you insinuate, he is a man who rigidly guards his own secrets?"

"Ah, *you* know him, I see, Haughton," smiled the Rector, "for that is his nature, and yet I did not assert it. My important discovery was made by very simple means—I read the motto on his seal. Well, and how is the garden going on, Mrs. Payte?"

"Every ripe apple gets stolen before I'm down in the morning."

"It is too bad," said the Rector, suppressing his laugh at the complaint, for which he had been thoroughly prepared. "Everything always goes wrong with the garden, doesn't it, Mrs. Payte? The hens used to dig up the seeds, and eat the currants as they came."

"Every one," assented the little lady, promptly; "though I wrapped each bush in muslin like a ghost."

"And the birds ate all the cherries," continued the Rector, sympathisingly.

"Every cherry. The little thieves would come rushing out of the tree in my very face—whole regiments and boarding-schools. Yet look at Selina, throwing crumbs to them at this very moment, to defy me. A nice set *they* are to encourage—savage, selfish little creatures. You once watch them when you feed them, and I dare vow you'll never feed them again. A father will hop off with the family dinner from under the very nose of his hungry wife and children, and a grown-up daughter will snatch the bread and butter from between her old mother's very teeth. Bah! a nice race they are to befriend."

The Rector turned away to hide his laugh, wondering how any one who grumbled so persistently at everything under the sun could yet take such a keen, unwavering interest in the affairs of others.

"I must go in now," he said, "to have a chat with Mrs. Disbrowe, and then to see Marie, poor girl! I shall overtake you young people presently. What do you think of the weather,

Haughton? Don't the clouds form rather too high? You smile at my anxiety, but if you'd a sprinkling of bank-notes lying out in a field, bound to lie there for a certain time, you would not relish the idea of rain and wind."

"Even without that simile, I understand your anxiety about your harvest, Mr. Romer," said Lawrence, coldly, as he stood at the gate waiting for Honor to return from bidding good-bye to Mrs. Disbrowe.

But when she came, all his scientific arrangements were knocked on the head. At the very last moment, Hervey forestalled him, and took his place at Honor's side, as he could not have done if the girl herself had not purposely aided his design. But to walk apart with Phoebe, as Honor evidently had intended him to do, was an alternative which Lawrence Haughton did not for an instant entertain; he sauntered up to Honor's right, as Hervey staunchly kept his position on her left, and walked so, dropping now and then a crumb of conversation to Phoebe at his right hand, but chiefly watching surreptitiously the face upon his left, until the Rector overtook them, and with frank diplo-

macy, soon established himself in Lawrence Haughton's place beside his favourite. Then Phœbe's guardian fell moodily back beside her, and entertained her on the way home with blunt monosyllables only.

"I think," said the girl, when she had exhausted all her lively subjects of conversation, and still ransacked her brain for more, under the delusion that she was amusing her companion, "that Hervey Trent would rather be with Honor than with Theodora; and I think Honor likes him very much."

"Rubbish! She is always laughing at him."

"Yes, I know," granted Phœbe, unwillingly; "but then that is all good-temperedly done, and he does not mind a bit, although he always *does* lecture her when Mrs. Trent and Theodora are by. I don't know why they should go on in that way, nor how Honor can ever choose to walk with him, when she might walk with you, Lawrence."

If Phœbe had had any idea of the storm she had invoked, she would not have tripped quite so happily past her guardian when she reached The Larches at last; but Phœbe Owen was not

gifted with the power of seeing below the surface in any single matter whatever.

Lawrence was ill—that fact appeared to be patent to Miss Haughton the moment she met her brother in the hall, as she invariably did; and Lawrence apparently found it less trouble to assent to this than to clear his gloomy brow, and shake off the sullen silence which pressed upon him. Nothing at dinner pleased him, and nothing that was said elicited a smile, or even an amiable word.

“You are very poorly, I am afraid, Lawrence, fretted Jane, pathetically; “I knew it would be so this morning when you took those mushrooms.”

“It is your head, Lawrence, I can see,” said Phoebe, softly; “I will fetch my eau-de-Cologne.”

“Nonsense!” cried Jane, authoritatively. “It is not the head, and I know what will do him more good.”

But Phoebe had rushed off for her scent-bottle.

“Foolish girl,” muttered Jane, following her stiffly; “as if I did not know best what is the matter with my own brother!”

"You never offer scent, or stimulant, or sympathy, Honor," said Lawrence, when they two were left; and now his tone, though vexed, was neither rough nor sullen. "Why don't you tell me what is the matter—as they do?"

"Don't they remind you," asked Honor, as she took a rosebud from one of the vases on the table, "of the shoemaker in *The Relapse*, who told Lord Foppington that he was mistaken in supposing his shoe pinched him?"

Lawrence laughed as if he had not been poorly for a year.

"There is no deceiving those beautiful eyes of yours," he said. "Give me that rose-bud; pin it in my coat yourself, and that will cure me."

But with the utmost care and deliberation she fastened it in her dress.

"There, Lawrence, just drink this, and you'll be all right," said Jane, entering fussily with some mixture in a glass. "You ought to have come home early and nursed yourself; you are so neglectful of your health."

"I've read somewhere," remarked Honor, sedately, "of a young Captain of Marines, who

was shot in the arm in battle, and when he asked permission to go below to have it amputated, he apologised for leaving action for 'such a trivial occasion ;' he was like Lawrence."

"Exactly," assented Jane and Phoebe in a breath, having heard the words, but being in much too great a fuss to notice the tone.

"For pity's sake, sit down, both of you!" cried Lawrence, in sudden, inexplicable anger. "Take these womanish condiments away."

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Captain Hervey Trent, all unconscious of any of Mr. Haughton's feelings towards him, pursued his way to Deergrove that evening, in a state of placid satisfaction, chiefly with himself, but, in a secondary degree, with one or two other people; and what he pondered as he went, was betrayed by a few words which even passed his lips as he opened the gate at Deergrove.

"I hope that, when I and Theodora are married and settled here, Honor will still be living close by us—not married to Lawrence, detestable idea, that—but still living there, or equally near us. I shall take care always to be kind to her; she is troublesome, of course, but I

don't object to taking a little trouble for her."

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When her visitors had all left East Cottage, Mrs. Payte heaved a sigh which sounded very like an expression of relief; but still it was with her usual eager briskness that she questioned Mrs. Disbrowe on various speeches, which she must very well have known were intended only for that lady's private ear.

"I guessed as much," she ejaculated, as complacently as if she had been drinking in a string of compliments. "I saw that Mr. Haughton was out of temper with me, and that Captain Trent was bored to death, and that that little Dutch-faced girl only stayed with me because her guardian did. And Honor Craven was disgusted with all I said to you."

"No!" put in the invalid anxiously.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Payte, with that shrewd glance of hers, which showed how hard it would be to deceive her. "She was whispering to you about me just before they went."

"She only said," answered the sick lady, with a smile of pleasant recollection, "she thought you did not mean your words to be hard and sharp, as—I said they were."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Fortune brings in *some* boats that are not steered."

Cymbeline.

LEAVING Kinbury, Royden Keith rode along the high-road towards Abbotsmoor; past the wall that skirted the park, and past the high hedge bordering the wood. Then he turned aside into a lane which ran at right angles with the highway and bordered the wood on the other side. He rode slowly here, not only because the lane was rough and deeply rutted, and Robin Hood of his own accord slackened his dainty steps, but apparently because Robin's master had no wish to hasten now.

He had ridden about a mile up the lane when he drew bridle, for he had come upon a solitary cottage just at a turning in the lane. The walls were propped, the thatch torn, and

the windows patched with paper, but a curl of thin blue smoke from the broken chimney rose against the dark background of the Abbotsmoor woods, and Royden, seeing this, dismounted without a moment's hesitation. Fastening Robin to an alder-bush which grew beside the rickety garden-gate, he walked up to the door of this desolate-looking little dwelling, and knocked upon it with his riding-whip.

"It *has* been a comfortable dwelling," he said to himself. "Can all the cottages on the Abbotsmoor estate have been left to fall to ruin when they would, as this one has?"

There came no answer to his knock, but, just as he stepped back to assure himself again of the presence of smoke that should betoken human occupation, an old man came round the corner of the cottage, with a spade upon his shoulder. He had evidently been at work in the garden behind, and so had not heard Royden's summons.

"What is it?" he inquired, suspiciously.

"I want to ask you," said Royden, in his pleasant, high-bred tones, "a few questions about this cottage and its late tenants. If you

will answer them for me, I shall feel very much obliged to you."

The man put down his spade, and leaned upon it as he stood. Royden, resting his arm upon the branch of a stunted apple-tree, looked towards the cottage door as if he would rather have gone within, gloomy and desolate as the place might be.

"Have you lived here long?" he asked, when he saw that he was expected to hold his interview there.

"I dunno what you call long," returned the old man, sulkily; "I've lived here better'n seven year—will that do ye?"

"You took the cottage, did you not, from a man named Territ?"

"Not I."

"Did you not? I understood he was living here about ten years ago. He was a miner, and he had a daughter named——"

"I know her name," put in the old man, scraping the sole of his boot upon the spade he held. "If that's all ye want, I can tell ye that—sir." The last word was added apparently against the speaker's will, as he glanced at the

face and figure opposite him. "Her name was Margit. I've heerd of her. She married from this cottage, and went with her husband to the county town. I've heerd nothin' of her since then. What should I hear, if she's a respectable 'ooman, and stays at home?"

"Then you did not know either of them personally?"

"Not I."


"Do you happen to know the name of Margaret's husband?"

"No—I never heerd it. That's a fine dog o' yourn, sir—fleet as the wind, I'll warrant. No, I don't trouble about my neebors' names—not I. Margit married a town chap, and I know none o' them. Is there anythin' more you'd care to ask?" added the old man, still gazing critically at the greyhound, which sat waiting at his master's feet.

"Margaret's father—is he dead?"

"Dead! Years and years ago. A fine horse that at the gate, sir—is it your'n?"

"Yes, it is mine," said Royden, pleasantly; "but, before I mount him, just let me look round your cottage kitchen, will you?"



"Ye're welcome," said the old man, in anything but a gracious tone. "There's naught to see in there, but, if ye like to take the trouble, why, ye can."

Saying this, he stuck his spade into the soil among his cabbages, and opened the door of the cottage.

Desolate as the little dwelling had looked from without, it was far more desolate, to Royden's eyes, within. Everything bore evidence of poverty, and nothing breathed the presence of a woman's care or thrift. But whether it was only of this that Royden was thinking, as he stood and looked round the bare and gloomy kitchen, no one could judge.

"The door leading into the garden at the back, you have had fastened up, I see."

The old man glanced with rude astonishment up into the grave, dark face.

"You know the place, then, do ye?"

"From hearsay," was the quiet answer; "I have heard of this cottage, of course. Who that has heard of old Mr. Myddelton's murder has not heard of this cottage of Territ's?"

"Ah, sure, it was talked a deal of at the time, I s'pose?"

"Gabriel Myddelton"—the visitor was slowly treading the cottage floor as he spoke—"threw out there, they say, the water in which he washed his hands after the murder, and in the fire there he threw his wristbands stained with blood. I see. You do not happen to know, I suppose, where he hid his coat?"

"Lor' bless me, what should I know of such things?" ejaculated the old man, with a pious horror of the subject. "I'd do better to forget that any murderer was ever in here at all. I didn't ever trouble to ask where the coat was found, or anythin' of the kind, not I."

"It was Margaret, I believe, who hid it, but I have never heard whether it was she or her father who brought it to light."

"Maybe, maybe," returned the old man, absently; "I never troubled to question anythin' about it. Girls are great ijjits sometimes. She may a-wanted to screen that young Myddelton; but I dunno—I dunno."

Royden was leaning against the rickety little table in the centre of the kitchen, his eyes bent

upon the small wood fire, his face full of deep thought, and one hand resting absently upon the greyhound's head. The old labourer stood watching him with a puzzled scrutiny. No figure like this had ever stood with him before upon his cottage hearth, and the very novelty of it worried him.

"He don't take on impident," he thought to himself, "nor he don't attempt preachin' and such like, but I don't see any good comin' here pokin' into that old murder that everybody's forgotten. That's a fine dog, though—there's no doubt about *him*."

Judging by the stress the old man laid on that last pronoun, there did exist a doubt about the dog's master, who rose now from his easy position, and turned his eyes from the fire with an appearance of having suddenly awakened to the present, from some long thought which had held him.

"Thank you," he said, offering his hand to the astonished occupant of this comfortless dwelling; "I have wanted to see this cottage ever since I heard the story of the murder. There is very little to see, as you said; still I'm

much obliged to you for showing it. Good night."


Quietly, and unobserved even by the old man's watchful eyes, he put a sovereign down upon the table, then re-trod the rough little garden-path, and mounted Robin.

"A nice evening, sir; you'll have a pleasant ride."

The old labourer had not seen the sovereign, yet his tone was changed. It was even respectful, though he could not have told what it was in his visitor which had caused this involuntary change. Royden did not notice it. Touching his hat kindly, in answer to the old man's awkward bow, he rode on up the lane at a trot.

No other cottage, and no other human being, came into sight until, a mile further on, he reached a stile over which a woman was climbing, with a heavy sheaf of wheat upon her head and a baby in her arms. Royden waited until she came down into the lane and turned to go his way; then he spoke.

"You are heavily laden to-night. Let me carry the little one as far as we are going on the same way."



He took the child and made her snug before him on the beautiful black horse, while the mother watched him, looking half afraid, until she saw the proud delight of the little girl so safely held in her grand position.

"You have been gleaning, of course?" said Royden, making his horse's steps suit the pace of the tired mother.

"Yes, sir."

A little pause. Royden's motive in talking was not to pass the time away, but to make the wisest use of it.

"I have just been," he said, breaking the pause as soon as he could, "to that ruinous cottage on the outskirts of the Abbotsmoor woods; do you know it? The Territs used to live there—a miner and his daughter, who made themselves well known at the time of the trial of old Mr. Myddelton's murderer."

"I remember, sir," replied the woman, respectfully; "at least I remember a little about it. Margaret Territ married just after; but I needn't tell you that, sir; those who know about the murder—at any rate about the escape—must know about Margaret's marriage."

"Is her husband living now?"


"No, sir ; at least I oughtn't to say even that for certain, for I only know what my ears pick up by chance. Margaret's living somewhere in this very neighbourhood now, sir, I believe. I've never seen her, but I've heard she came back here some bit ago as a widow. It may be many miles off that she is, but I don't know ; people talk about her as if she was somewhere round about here."

"You are sure she is a widow?" questioned Royden.

"They said so, sir, when she came ; that's all I know."

"You do not really belong to this part, I suppose—I mean, you have not lived here all your life?"

"No, sir, only since my marriage, four years ago. I come from Wales, but my husband has always lived here, and *he* knows no more about the Territs than I do. The old man was hurt in a mine, and was a long time dying. I can't tell you why Margaret should have come back to live about here. She was left a widow with just enough to live upon."



"And you cannot tell me what her husband's name was?" queried Royden.

"No, indeed I can't, sir; and I don't know who can. It never seems to have been let out, or else it was never cared about. That's our cottage, sir, across the field, and we turn up here. Thank you kindly."

She took her little girl from Royden's arms and went on her way, the child crying to go back, and the mother soothing her; while Royden rode quickly on, crossing meadows, and following lanes, until he had left Abbotsmoor miles behind, and found himself on a small rugged heath.

"I ought," he mused, glancing around him, "to be able to get back to Kinbury without retracing the way I have come. How will it be? Kinbury lies over there, due east, so if I cut off a corner of the heath and push straight on, I can hardly miss my way, though I must necessarily be late."

When he had cut off the corner of the heath, he stopped in surprise. At this spot two high hedgerows ended abruptly, and between them the grass grew rank and untrodden. A narrow,

hedged-in strip of scanty pasture-land it might have been, but Royden's quick eye detected at once that this had been a lane. Was it passable now?

Just then he caught sight of a man crossing the heath at a little distance, and, riding quickly up to him, he questioned him.

He was a farmer, young and well to do, but he spoke in a tone of quiet respect as he glanced with shrewd criticism at horse and rider.

"I'm almost a stranger here myself," he said, "but I have heard these lanes spoken of as impassable. When the line to the mine was cut, it made those old lanes useless, so new roads were made, and those by-ways have been allowed to run to seed, as you see. I don't think I would attempt to take them, if I were you; you want a stiff north-country pony for such an experiment, not such a horse as that."

"Thank you, but I think I will try," said Royden.

"Pure perverseness," muttered the farmer, left to his solitary walk again. "He's sure to have to turn back again."

Along that grass-grown track between the high

hedgerows, Royden rode, the steps of his young horse constantly impeded, and its head tossed impatiently under this unusual treatment.

“Where can we be?”

The exclamation broke from Royden when, after half-an-hour's slow riding, he reached a chained but broken gate which stretched like a terminus across the rough, forgotten way. Robin, at all events, could not pass this padlocked barrier.

“The question is,” mused Royden, “can I venture to leave him here for a time, or must I turn now? I would rather go on, if I could, and see if there is any cottage hereabouts where they remember——”

The thought was broken by a rustling in the hedge, and presently there emerged into the lane a ragged, hatless lad, with a look in his bright eyes, half of fear and half of defiance.

“Trespassing!” said Royden, looking coolly down upon him. “What are you going to do with the nuts?”

“Nuts, sir!” the lad echoed, with the innocent look of one well versed in falsehood. “What nuts?”

"These," said Royden, touching with his riding-whip one after another of the pockets which bulged from the lad's shabby garments.

"Oh, those," said the boy, brought sturdily to bay, "mother 'll sell 'em."

"What will your mother get for a handful—sixpence?"

"Bless ye, no, sir ; threepence, maybe."

"Well, I will give you sixpence for the first handful, and you shall see how cleverly my dog can crack and eat them."

To the boy, grasping his sixpence in one hand and supplying with the other the nuts which Lachne deftly cracked, those ten minutes were minutes of perfect enjoyment ; but they faded into insignificance when the crowning joy was given.

"If I tie my horse to this gate," said Royden, suiting the action to his words in his prompt, cool way, "can you watch and take care of him till I come back ? Don't come too near him—he isn't used to little lads ; but you've watched a horse before now, I dare say, and, if you do it well this time, I have some loose shillings in my pocket which may find their way into yours."

The boy's eyes widened and brightened under his shaggy hair.

"Yes, sir ; I've tended horses afore now, sir," he said, with a friendly nod. "Will you take the dog, sir?"

"He will do as he likes," said Royden, as he climbed the gate and walked on.

But the boy's doubt was soon settled, for the greyhound darted over the gate, and was close beside his master in a moment.

Through two or three fields Royden had walked, when he found himself in a small three-cornered patch of meadow, shut in entirely by two hedges and the embankment of that single railway line to the mines, which was the cause of the way being so neglected and forsaken.

"Will there be a little nook beyond the line," questioned Royden to himself, "or does it open presently to the highway? I suppose I had better not go on from here this evening. Ah! —great Heaven!"

For, before his eyes, a child sat on the high embankment, its figure clearly outlined against the evening sky, and in his ears the panting of

a fast-approaching engine sounded with a deafening portent. Where was it? Which way was the train coming? How far away was it? How soon would it rush over the spot on which his eyes were fastened too eagerly for him to see aught else? Soon—in one minute, perhaps, it might be. The sight of the great engine would give the child one awful moment of panic, in which it would be helpless in its horror; then the train would pass on, and there would be no child sitting there against the evening light, but scattered on the rails——

A thousand impossibilities darted into Royden's mind, as he stood and saw the child playing there in its utter unconsciousness, while Death came rushing on; a thousand impossibilities, while, below all, was the awful consciousness that human aid was powerless here. But, for all that, it was only through one breathless second that he stood thus. In the next he was again the man who had faced danger and death too often to be made a woman by it, even when it came in such a form as this and he knew that his own arm was powerless to help or stay it.

His resolution was as swift as thought. One quick, low whistle, a swift, firm gesture of his hand, a keen, eager look upon his face, which the intelligent eyes that watched it seemed to understand—then Royden stood alone; and the greyhound—literally now “fleet as the wind”—sped across the field, and up the embankment. The impulse of the child, as the animal darted up to him, was to fly in the opposite direction, and this saved him; for in one instant he had fallen down the steep embankment on the opposite side of the line to that up which Lachne had sprung. To have seen the mighty, panting engine bearing down upon him would have paralysed the child in every limb; to see the hound rush towards him gave him just the terror which urged flight, and he had fallen before the train rolled past.

Royden's eyes were strong and fearless, and had looked on death close and bravely more than once; but there glistened something womanish on their lashes when he stood upon the line after the train had passed, and saw something scattered there, which bore no likeness now to the greyhound which for years had kept as

faithfully beside his master as he had kept that day.

Royden murmured no words of praise or pity as he stood looking down upon these ghastly fragments; and, keenly as he mourned his favourite, there rose no bitter query in his mind, "Had the life of a neglected child been worth this sacrifice?" There are some minds in which such questions never can have birth.

Royden turned away with one deep, quiet sigh, stifling the memories of old days through which this dog had been his only companion, a faithful and a constant one, always watchful and always true. His care was wanted now for the child whom Lachne's death had saved. So, struggling bravely with his thoughts, while his heart was heavy, Royden lifted the unconscious child, a boy of five or six years old, and saw a deep cut across his low, brown forehead, and one lock of fair hair lying upon it stained with blood. Tenderly—almost as if the strong arms had been used to such a task—Royden carried him to where, about a hundred yards away, a cottage stood alone under a giant poplar. As

he approached it he saw that a woman was standing shrinkingly against the wall, gazing at him with a kind of vacant terror as he advanced.

"Can you," asked Royden, wondering at the expression on the woman's handsome, care-lined face, "direct me to the home of this child? He has had a fall, and I want to leave him with his mother."

The woman raised both hands and touched the child very gently, but she did not move her eyes from Royden's face—so full of grave and quiet kindness then.

"Your child?" he asked, pitifully, as he watched her. "I am very glad; and, if this is your home, let us go in now."

"I saw," she said, still without moving, "but I could not stir. I could not run. I could not even pray. I saw him sitting there, and the engine coming—coming—close upon him. Then I saw him—saved. This scratch"—laying her finger softly on the cut—"is nothing to me, because, in that one awful moment, I saw him—dead!"

"Come," said Royden, gently, but not offer-

ing now to give the child to her; "we want warm water to bathe his face."

It was he, though, who led the way into the cottage, and when the mother had followed him in, she only fell on her knees beside the little cotton-covered couch on which Royden had tenderly laid down the child.

"I saw it," she cried again, laying a soft brown hand upon the boy's cut forehead, as if to hide the stains she would not yet remove. "I saw death rushing to seize my child, and then I saw him—saved!"

Gently Royden touched her on the shoulder, and told her what few mothers would have required to be told.

"It is not want of love," he whispered to himself. "Poor thing—poor mother! Will solitude work this, or has it been a shock?"

For a whole hour he waited with the mother and her child—her only one, that fact was plain to him without a word; her only one, and she a widow. Then he rose to go, for the little boy was sleeping calmly, with a soft bandage round his head, and the mother's wide and puzzled eyes had found the blest relief of tears.

"There are one or two things that I want to borrow of you," said Royden then, "and a few feet of your waste ground."

She understood in a moment, and through the next hour's bitter work she helped him almost as efficiently, and quite as silently, as a man could have done.

"Such sights as this would make most women shrink and faint," thought Royden, "but not this woman. Can her dim eyes have looked on such a sight before?"

"Thank you for all your help," he said, aloud, "and for that quiet spot you chose for my dog's grave. I will come again some day to see the little lad. He will soon be all right, and I fancy he will never again push his way through difficulties and obstacles up to the railway-line."

"Never again," the woman returned, in her dreamy way, her undrooping, vacant eyes still fixed upon Royden as he stood in the low cottage kitchen. "I have not thanked you yet," she faltered, "I—cannot."

"Your thanks are due elsewhere," said Royden, gently, "not to me."

A few minutes more he lingered, hardly lik-

ing even yet to leave her in her sorrow and loneliness; and then—for the first time since he had seen the child's unconscious figure sitting against the evening light, while he heard the panting engine close upon it—there rushed back into his mind the motive of this search of his.

“I have been to-night,” he said, “to that cottage beyond the Abbotsmoor woods, where Territ the miner used to live. He had a daughter, I believe. Do you happen to remember them at all?”

“No, no.”

The woman's answer came clear and quick, and her eyes grew startled in their unmoved gaze.

“Do you not? I am particularly anxious to meet with some trace of this girl—girl I say, but I am thinking of what she must have been ten years ago. She is a woman of thirty now, I should think.”

No answer, and Royden went on, his gaze a little more intent, his thoughts awaking to suspicion.

“You do not happen, you say, to have heard where she lives now, or even her name?”

"No, no."

"Can you tell me whether the Christian name of any of your neighbours is Margaret? It would help me if you could tell me even so little as that."


Her startled gaze deepened a little, her lips shook even as she compressed them firmly, her hands were locked before her as if the tension gave her strength to stand.

"I have no neighbours."

"Thank you, then it is useless to ask you more." Royden said this very quietly, but a shrewd ear would have detected the undertone. "Good-bye," he added, and his eyes were kind in their gaze, and hid the thoughts that lay below.

The woman stood quite still for a few minutes after he had left, and then she turned with a shiver to the fire, murmuring the name to herself again and again.

"Margaret Territ!—Margaret Territ! What should he want with her—with Margaret? She died—many years ago—ten years ago—quite suddenly she died, on the day of that trial. He was guilty of murder, they said. Ah, that was a



double murder! No wonder she died—poor Margaret!”

The simple dreamy smile with which she had been looking down upon her sleeping child, gave place to one which, swiftly as it sped, looked pitifully out of character upon the worn face—a smile of caution which amounted to cunning.

“He saved my child—I remember that; but—he shouldn’t have spoken of Margaret.”

On the strip of carpet on her hearth, with her chin in her palms and her eyes upon the fire, the woman sat for more than an hour, buried so deeply in thought, that when, at last, the child awoke, and roused her with its sudden cry, she sprang to her feet with a shriek of fear, and gazed in horror round the cottage walls.

CHAPTER IX.

" Friend or brother,
He forfeits his own blood that spills another."

IT was the day of the Abbotsmoor picnic, and Phoebe Owen, with a care-encumbered expression of countenance, added the finishing touches to her elaborate toilette.

"I don't know how it is," she fretted, looking at herself in the glass as she put on her tall hat with its pink roses and blue feathers, "but whatever way I do my hair I always look the same. I learned this new way from Theodora, and it doesn't make me look any better—does it, Honor?"

Thus appealed to, Honor answered, with pleasant rashness, that it was not at all a good thing for girls to be altered by the way they did their hair; and then she put her head

gravely on one side, to criticise the plump little figure which she had so patiently and brightly assisted to adorn.


"Well," inquired Phoebe, anxiously, "what will they think of it?"

"I can imagine the Rector's eyes when he says, 'Phoebe, my dear, what a very *secular* costume!'"

"You are always laughing, and seeming as if you weren't, Honor," said Phoebe, pettishly. But for all that, now that the arduous performance was over, and she could see the startling *tout ensemble* in the glass, her own lips broke into a gratified smile. "Lawrence will see that I have made the most of the money he gave me, won't he, Honor?"

"Indeed he will; but I must run off. Think of me here in my dressing-gown at five-and-twenty minutes past twelve, and Lawrence ordered the waggonette for half-past!"

"But you see," put in Phoebe, unwilling even yet for her cousin to go, "Lawrence will wait for you and not be angry, and he makes such a fuss if I am late. Is Jane ready?—and how does she look?"



"Very nice," replied Honor, shortly, for she never would allow any of Phoebe's spiteful remarks on Miss Haughton's personal appearance. Hard and suspicious as Jane Haughton might be to her young kinswoman, this young kinswoman, on whom nature had lavished her fairest gifts, had never a word to say against Jane's appearance.

"In her temper, I mean," explained Phoebe. "There's Lawrence calling! Here we are, Lawrence!" she cried, rushing past Honor and down the stairs. "At least here I am, and Honor won't be a minute."

Without even a thought for Phoebe's selfishness, Honor ran lightly into her own room, and five minutes afterwards sprang down the last few steps into the hall, alighting unexpectedly beside Lawrence as he paced to and fro waiting for her.

"Oh! Lawrence, I did not see you! I fancied you would be fuming on the box of the wagonette."

"I chose to fume here instead," said Lawrence, trying to assume a sternness which he could not feel while she stood beside him in her bright

and girlish beauty. "Sit on the box beside me, Honor, and the man and the hamper shall go inside."

With only a slight shake of the head for answer, Honor stepped up into the waggonette, and Mr. Haughton followed her, to Phoebe's great delight.

"I thought you were going to drive," remarked Jane.

"No," he answered, curtly. "Take the reins, Hare."

It was scarcely half-an-hour's drive from The Larches to Abbotsmoor, yet the waggonette was the last vehicle which drew up before the empty mansion, where all the guests were gathered, some dismounting and others standing about. There was Theodora, resplendent in green and white grenadine, lingering near the dog-cart, from which Royden Keith was assisting little Mrs. Payte to alight. There was the jovial Rector, waking the sleeping echoes of the place with his hearty laugh, while his comely wife went in and out among the party, dispensing sage but unheeded advice on the subject of hampers. There was Captain

Trent, sauntering to and fro, and vouchsafing languid instructions to the men-servants from Deergrove. There was Mrs. Trent, in heavy bronze-coloured silk, making strenuous use of her eyes and fan. There was Lady Somerson, courteously apologising for the absence of Sir Philip, and making herself quietly and unobtrusively pleasant, as high-bred ladies sometimes do. There was Pierce, in possession of a huge luncheon basket; and there was little Monsieur Verrien, arranging his camera in front of the house, and weighed down by a greater amount of anxiety than pressed upon the rest of the company conjointly.

"The photograph must be taken first," asserted Miss Trent. "Who will fetch Monsieur Verrien?"

Monsieur Verrien came up, and began at once the "business" of his day.

"Pardon, mesdames et messieurs," he said, accosting the whole party in a vague, nervous way, not knowing who took the lead, "but did Lady Lawrence say she would have the façade with the group?"

"Yes, the façade with the family clustered there."

"Thanks, monsieur. And now will you kindly tell me who I am to take?"

He had happened now to address Lady Somerson, and she drew back smiling.

"Almost everyone but myself," she said.

His speech passed on to the next lady, little Mrs. Payte, in her broad brown hat and old-fashioned alpaca dress.

"Not me. Bless the man, does he think the whole neighbourhood is peopled by old Myddelton's kindred?"

"He is a foreigner," explained Lady Somerson, gently, "and almost a stranger here."

"Oh! I know all about him," said the small old lady, with a grunt which greatly amused some of the bystanders; "but I wish somebody would put it to him in his native tongue that Lady Lawrence, whoever she may be, did not ask for *my* portrait."

Again the little photographer's question passed on, and this time was intercepted by Royden Keith, who shook his head and smiled.

"No, monsieur," he said, in his courteous way; "I too must be left out of your picture."

"You don't scorn the idea of being one of

our family quite as Mrs. Payte did," remarked Theodora.

He stood back, watching the little Frenchman arrange his group, and Mrs. Payte, chatting volubly all the time, took up her station near him. Lady Somerson and the Rector stood nearer the photographer, apparently more interested.

"Theodora Trent looks very well in that position," remarked Mrs. Payte, her shrewd eyes glistening as she watched the preparation for the photograph, "and she knows it."

It was at that moment, as Verrien walked back towards his camera, that Theodora, with a smiling glance, beckoned to Royden that she wanted him. Mrs. Payte looked sharply up into his face, and saw him shake his head and bow.

"How kind of her!" she said, feelingly. "She would have you in the photograph, if possible. It will make a hideous picture," she continued, presently, with placid enjoyment of her idea. "Look at Hervey Trent's lackadaisical attitude, and Mr. Haughton's assumption of careless ease. That blue fabric on

Phoebe's head will come out as a huge white blemish; and just notice the amount of space Theodora's skirts occupy. Lady Lawrence will know a great deal about them from that photograph, won't she? How is she to know, for instance, that Miss Trent made all the arrangements to suit herself, and that Honor Craven, standing so prettily there against the house, is laughing the whole notion of the thing to scorn? Bah! I have no patience with any of them."

"So I see, Mrs. Payte," said Royden, laughing. "Perhaps, if you had the patience, the picture would not seem quite so hideous."

"May be. For goodness sake, let us walk about till that farce is over!"

They had strolled quite half a mile from the house, when Royden gave an imperceptible start and stood still.

"This is—— I have heard of this oak," he said, as they stopped before a splendid oak-tree on the outskirts of the park.

Mrs. Payte looked up into his face, and then higher, among the branches of the oak.

"Of course," she returned, sharply; "every-

thing about old Myddelton's place has been well talked of."

"This tree must be a thousand years old," Royden continued, moving nearer, "and it is hollow."

"How quick you are!" observed the old lady, as she tripped round the tree. "You spoke before you had seen the opening."

She was stopping then in front of an aperture four or five feet high, and a couple of feet wide.

"What a huge trunk!" she said, looking in over the foot of bark which still remained, and formed a kind of stile at the entrance to the cavity. This hollow would dine a dozen people. I like to see these old trees on an old estate; but I don't like this estate; do you, Mr. Keith?"

"I should," replied Royden, walking quietly on at the little lady's side, "if I could see it utilized and beautified; with a man's hand and heart at work about it, and a woman's bright, sweet presence."

"Can you fancy it?"

"Yes."

"Bah!" said the old lady, answering brusquely Royden's quiet word. "How can old Myddelton's money cause anything but evil, when we remember how it was garnered?"

"Very easily," returned Royden, gazing on the empty house which lay before them. "Can we possibly hold that heathenish idea of there being a curse on old Myddelton's money? Do you believe that his wealth—if well and humbly used—would not do the good that other money could; and—if, as I said, nobly and generously used—return in blessings on the giver?"

"No—old Myddelton's," opposed Mrs. Payte, sturdily. "I remember once reading an epitaph, which ran in this way—

'That I spent, that I had;
That I gave, that I have;
That I left, that I lost.'

So you see how old Myddelton managed? He spent little, so he had little; he gave none, so he has none; and he left much, so he lost mightily. How I hate the very idea of wealth when I think of it! See, they are beckoning to us. Dinner, I suppose—always the key-note of a pic-nic."

The cloths were spread in the shade of the avenue trees, under which a merry group had gathered when Royden and Mrs. Payte came up.

The photograph was taken, and now there was nothing more for them to do but enjoy themselves just in their own idle way, and, first of all, by lingering over the meal, for which everyone was ready. Theodora's management of her own personal affairs was, as usual, excellent, and, viewed from *her* stand-point, thoroughly successful. She took her seat between Royden Keith and Hervey Trent, and was waited upon to her heart's content. Whether all the others fared as well, signified very little indeed to her.

Phoebe never did succeed in her mild diplomacy, so it was no surprise to her to find herself at a quite impassable distance from her guardian, who was assiduously waiting on Honor, and chafing very visibly at Honor's reception of his service. Captain Trent, too, dovetailed in his mild attentions, but these Honor received with equally careless compos-

ure. It was a rather difficult part to play, this of Captain Hervey's. With Miss Trent's presence and requirements so persistently asserted, and her eyes seldom letting any one of his acts escape them, his straying inclinations were somewhat difficult of accomplishment.

Whatever Royden's part might have been, he played it with perfect ease, sometimes humorously, but at all times quietly and easily. He had stories to tell now and then, short and pithy experiences, which, though his own, never contained repetition of the objectionable personal pronoun. So well he told them, too, that even those—and there were more than one—who wished to slight them and him, could not do so; they were drawn against their wills to listen to his stories. So well he told them—his voice perfectly grave, and no smile stirring his lips, though his eyes might be full of fun—that he never was interrupted, to the ruin of the story, or had to shorten it ignominiously. But once he made a sudden pause, and finished abruptly.

“That wasn't the real end of the adventure,

Mr. Keith," said Theodora, excitedly. "Please don't imagine that you can take us in so easily."

"You are wise, Mr. Keith," Mrs. Payte remarked. "In this place and this company, you never intended to intrude a touching episode, though I do believe you would tell that even better. What is it you have there, Miss Trent?"

Theodora had looked with such unutterable insolence at the old lady during her interruption, that everyone felt a little startled by the cool conclusion being addressed particularly to her.

"*Tartelettes au fromage à la crème*," replied Theodora, with languid frigidity.

"Good to eat?"

Theodora passed the dish back to the footman behind her, without deigning a reply. But the glance, intended, as it was, for utter annihilation, missed its aim.

"In our young days, Mrs. Payte," put in the Rector, classing himself genially with the old lady of threescore years and ten, "we had not found out the vast advantages of these French abbreviations."

“Abbreviations! Is *gelée au rin* an abbreviation of ‘jelly?’ Pooh! in my young days we called a spade a spade, and we called affectation, folly.”

Except that the sayings of such a small and meanly-clad old lady must necessarily be vulgar in the extreme, and below the notice of refined and elegant minds, this suggestive speech would have met with a crushing retort from Miss Trent; but, being so, it was only consigned to a deserved oblivion, and Theodora graciously continued her efforts at entertainment. But at intervals during the day she relieved herself by wondering why that common and sour-tempered little being should ever have been allowed to come among them; but was always on her guard as to the recipient of this wonder, because she was perfectly aware in whose escort she had arrived.

“Hervey, my dear,” observed Mrs. Trent, aside to her nephew, before they separated after dinner, “the more Theodora shows her dislike to that chattering old person, the more Honor Craven chats with her. You should tell the girl what bad taste this shows; she will desist then.”

Acting complacently on this suggestion, Captain Trent, not at all unwillingly, drew Honor aside to speak seriously to her.

"Thank you, Hervey," she said. "How good it is of you to think of these things even at a pic-nic!"

Hervey told her graciously that of course he always thought of "these things," and then had the mortification of seeing her escape from him as swiftly as possible, and straightway join a group in which the obnoxious old lady was a prominent figure.

"Now we are going over the house."

Two or three voices said it at once, and a general move was made. Jane Haughton rose and shook the crumbs from her lap, heaving a sigh over the abundant remnants of the feast. Pierce, who during the dinner had been worth two or three of the other men put together, was quietly waiting on one solitary man who dined among the avenue trees at a little distance.

"Will he repack his hamper or waste it? All the nicest things here are what Mr. Keith brought. Silly extravagance!"

With her mind under this pressure, Jane

Haughton put up her parasol, and moved stolidly forward, as one prepared to do her duty by viewing the house. Honor ran up at this moment and joined the group.

"Where have you been?" inquired Jane.

"Only talking to Monsieur Verrien. I said he could go over the house, too, as it was open. He would like to see the pictures."

"He can go with the servants when we have been," remarked Theodora, coldly.

"Suppose we make an arrangement," proposed the Rector, "and then we needn't feel dependent on each other. We meet here—is it not so?—at six o'clock, for tea, and for our start homewards."

"Not homewards," put in Theodora, taking the words from Mrs. Trent. "You are coming to Deergove then, please; we want to finish the day with a dance. You all promise to come?"

The "all" was uttered certainly, but it was only to Royden Keith that she chanced to turn just in that interrogatory pause. He did not seem to notice this, and the general acceptance of Theodora's invitation was hearty enough. Mrs. Payte, who certainly had not been particularly

addressed, even if included, thanked Miss Trent in a very marked manner, and expressed herself as most happy.

"Have you license to shoot over the Abbotsmoor estate, Mr. Keith?" asked Honor, as they walked on towards the house.

"Yes."

"The steward is a niggardly fellow," put in Lawrence Haughton. "How do you think he served me last year? He sent me a present of game—a brace of birds and a hare, I think—and I, of course, sent him a note of thanks. A few months afterwards, he came to me to settle a little private matter of his, by law, and when he received my bill he brought it to me, entreating me to remember the game. I did, and let the bill go. In another month he sent me a bill of this blessed game by a man who was to wait for the payment."

"What did you do?" inquired Mr. Keith, laughing.

"While his man waited, I sent a clerk to his house with *my* bill to wait for payment."

"You were quite equal to the occasion," remarked Honor, turning to join another group.

"How horribly dismal it looks!" cried Phoebe, pausing on the threshold of the great echoing hall. "I daren't venture in without some strong escort. Lawrence, will you take me through?"

He took her in, and returned to join Honor.

So instinctively she shrank from him, that, noticing it herself, she tried to laugh off the involuntary gesture of repugnance.

"I am a real Craven," she said, "I must hover in the Rector's protection."

And, to Mr. Romer's intense amusement, she kept beside him through all the dusty rooms and staircases, on which the cobwebs hung as thickly as the leaves hung upon the ancient trees without. But, in spite of her words, Honor had no shadow of craven fear within her inquisitive eyes.

They reached the portrait-gallery at last, but found it difficult to examine and criticise the pictures, until they became accustomed to the heavy semi-light.

"Mrs. Payte," said Honor, leaving the Rector now, and linking her arm in that of the small old lady, "you have never seen the pictures

before. Come and let me show you Gabriel Myddelton."

They stood before the portrait for a few minutes in silence, and by that time the others had joined them; all anxious, it would seem, to examine this one picture.

"What a young face it is!" said Lady Somerson. "This portrait must have been taken some time before he quarrelled with his uncle."

"The date is 1860," read Lawrence. "That was one year before the murder. He was nineteen then."

"It is a handsome face," observed Mrs. Payte, her hat pushed back, and her head elevated that she might get a good look at the picture, "but I thought that Gabriel Myddelton was fairer;—more, for instance, like Captain Trent."

"No," said Lady Somerson; "he was dark. A little more like—Mr. Keith, only not so tall, nor so finely built, nor so—handsome."

"Or rather not so old," put in Royden laughing, as he frankly met her scrutinising gaze. "Mr. Haughton, I have never heard how Gabriel Myddelton escaped from gaol."

"Have you not?" remarked Lawrence, haugh-

tily, ignoring the evident question put to him.

"Will you kindly tell me?"

"The escape was managed by the girl whose evidence had gone to hang him, and by her lover, who, as ill fate would have it, was warder in the county gaol."

"As ill fate would have it. Yes?" said Royden, with a curious tone in the question, half of scorn and half of amusement.

"The man got admission for the girl to see Myddelton," put in Mr. Romer, noticing Mr. Haughton's surliness, "and she passed into the condemned cell in profuse tears. She was seen to walk out to the dog-cart that waited for her, and then to pass back again, and out again. There was a confused account of these passings to and fro, as if the gaolers had been off their guard, taking little heed of her in her tears. At any rate, the condemned cell was empty next morning. Gabriel Myddelton was gone, and the warder knew nothing about it. They dismissed him, of course, as without his connivance the girl would have been closely watched, as well as the prisoner; but nothing could ever be proved against him, and the mys-

tery never has been solved. Several people met Margaret Territ driving alone to the gaol, and several met her driving back, still alone; but the fact remained. Old Myddelton's murderer never was seen after her visit."

"A clever escape," said Royden, with a quiet smile.

"Why, Mr. Keith, what credit you give the miserable young woman!" exclaimed Mrs. Trent. "We know hardly anything of the escape; how do you know it was clever?"

"True, Mr. Haughton favoured me with *very* few particulars," assented Royden, coolly.

"From that time Margaret Territ has been literally lost to the world," continued the Rector, "and I feel sure we can never know any further particulars of Gabriel Myddelton's escape."

"Unless we some day hear them from Gabriel Myddelton himself."

"Oh, Mr. Keith," cried Theodora, "please don't talk of such a thing! Come—why have we stayed so long before this horrid portrait; and why talk so much about a wicked felon?"

"I suppose," said Royden Keith, addressing Mr. Haughton in a clear, marked tone, "that

there is no doubt about Gabriel Myddelton's having been, as Miss Trent says, a wicked felon ? *You* would doubtless well investigate the facts."

"Supposing Gabriel Myddelton innocent," Mrs. Payte struck in, drowning Lawrence's scornful retort, "would he have old Myddelton's money?"

"Impossible, even if he came back and acquitted himself. The money was willed from him."

"Phoebe," whispered Honor, as they moved from before the picture, "Mr. Keith is quite sure that Gabriel did murder old Mr. Myddelton. I can see he is."

"Of course," replied Phoebe, carelessly; "who ever doubted it?"

"That's pretty," exclaimed Mrs. Payte, standing opposite a heavily-framed painting of a young girl and a pony; "and I declare it reminds me of our dinner. Why is that?"

"Because it is the same sweep of park, Mrs. Payte," explained Honor. "This is the spot where we dined, and the pony and girl stand just between where we were and the front of the mansion. Do you guess that it is the portrait of Lady Lawrence when a

girl? She was not fifteen when she went out to India, you know."

"I'd rather see a likeness taken later," spoke Mrs. Payte, curtly. "That tells nothing of what she would be now."

"We have a sketch of her taken lately," said Honor. "She is tall and stout, with smooth black hair, and a placid, serious face."

"I don't like that sort of old lady," objected Mrs. Payte, moving away impatiently, and leaving Honor to wonder a little at the bad taste of this speech from one who was so essentially different.

"It certainly *is* a beautiful park," said the little old lady, stopping before one of the gallery windows. "What do you intend to do, Mr. Haughton, if you inherit Abbotsmoor?"

"Let it," replied Lawrence promptly.

"And you, Miss Owen?"

"Certainly let it," returned Phoebe, delighted to echo her guardian's answer.

"And you, Miss Trent?"

"Pull it down," said Theodora, "and build a handsome and modern mansion, raised on terraces."

"Wise," assented the old lady as she passed the question on. "You, Captain Trent, doubtless agree with Miss Trent?"

"I suppose so," replied Hervey, lazily; "but I should soon cut down whole acres of the timber."

"Wise, too. And you Miss Craven?"

"I never thought about it, but I should—restore it, I suppose," said Honor, smiling at the question; "restore it, and——"

"And what?" inquired the old lady, sharply.

"And try to make the old place, and even the old name, honoured again."

"Gabriel has rendered that impossible," interposed Lawrence.

"Quite impossible," assented Mrs. Payte; "and your idea is childish, Honor. I should have said, if I had been you, pull it all down and leave not one stone upon another."

"I declare, Honor," whispered Hervey, when the group was scattered again, "that little old creature has done nothing but grumble and make herself disagreeable all day. I shall tell her so presently."

"Which will be making yourself much more disagreeable, Hervey."

They strolled for some time longer through the great gloomy rooms, admiring and finding fault, chattering and criticising, Theodora's sarcasm excited very often by Honor's fresh delight over what she called trifles, and little Mrs. Payte popping always just into that very group where she did not seem to be wanted.

So closely had Lawrence Haughton followed Honor through that day, and so merry had she been, that it was a great surprise to Royden Keith, late on in the afternoon, to come upon her seated in one of the staircase windows alone, and with a wistful earnestness in her eyes as she looked out over the park.

"It is a beautiful estate, Miss Craven," he said, as he paused beside her, looking intently, and rather quizzically, down into her face. "Are you wishing it were yours?"

"No," she answered, in a tone as grave as the beautiful young face; "I am only wondering how anyone could have lived here such a life as old Mr. Myddelton lived. And——"

"And?" he questioned, gently.

"And wondering if such a life could ever be led here again."

"Heaven forbid!"

She looked up into his face, anxiously, and he met the gaze with one of fearless confidence.

"I have no fear," he said; "I see no cloud upon old Myddelton's home now, and no blight upon his wealth."

Then she smiled, still looking up into his face; and somehow it seemed as if that gaze, or the few words, had given each a quiet confidence in the other.

CHAPTER X.

He little thought, when he set out,
Of running such a rig.

COWPER.

THE tea-tables had been hurriedly carried in from the park to the great hall, and the guests had gathered there in haste; those, at least, whom the suddenly lowering clouds had warned in time.

"It was very lucky we were so near," said Theodora, looking down complacently upon her thin, crisp dress.

"Very," assented Phoebe, with most heartfelt emphasis; "only it is a pity Honor's away."

"Is Honor away?" asked Captain Trent, looking out upon the fast-falling rain. "What a bore for her!"

"Dear me, dear me!" grumbled Mrs. Payte, moving restlessly about. "How silly of the child to run off in that way, with no waterproof, or goloshes, or umbrella!"

One or two laughed, recalling the picture of Honor as they saw her last, in her pretty summer dress, and with the bright sunshine round her; but others were too much vexed to smile.

"Where did you see her last, Phoebe?" inquired Lady Somerson, And everyone waited to hear the answer.

"I saw her last at one of the side entrances," explained Phoebe. "I knew she was going about the park to—to hide from Lawrence, and Lawrence came up just then and asked her where would she go, and she said nowhere; and as soon as ever he was gone, saying he would be back in a minute, she ran off. Afterwards he came back and went to find her. But I don't suppose he has, Honor is so quick."

"Miss Owen, if you will kindly tell me which are Miss Craven's shawls and umbrella," said Royden, turning over a pile of wraps which lay in the hall, "I will find her."

"I think," interposed Theodora, in a raised,

distinct tone, "that we can safely trust Honor to find her way here. She knows the park well, and you do not, Mr. Keith."

But Royden answered lightly that he was used to finding his way, and donning his loose overcoat, and carrying a closed umbrella and the blue waterproof which Phoebe had given him, he started. He had a strong idea that Honor would be taking shelter in that hollow oak on the outskirts of the park, and though he had no motive for the surmise, he was not mistaken. In the sombre gloom within the bole of the great oak, he saw the girl's bright face looking out, with a doubtful expression; as if the enjoyment of the position were somewhat questionable, but yet to be staunchly maintained. Royden, smiling at the wet figure in its heavy frame, handed her the cloak, and told her she might venture to the house in that, and under the umbrella.

"I am not coming," she said, "I am thoroughly soaked. I was wet through before I could reach this shelter, and I shall be scolded and laughed at."

"Let me help you on with your cloak," was

Royden's only response, as he held it at the opening of the tree. "No one will see anything but the cloak. May I come in?"

"No," said Honor, drawing back. "I won't be seen. Go back to your tea, Mr. Keith; and presently, when you are all busy starting, I'll slip up and take my place; then I shall escape——"

She stopped suddenly, but Royden guessed what she wished to avoid. It was not difficult for him to imagine either Miss Haughton's corrections, Miss Trent's sneers, or Miss Owen's exclamations.

"Very well, I will wait for you here," he said, coolly.

So, leaning against the tree in silence, he waited; while she grew gradually uncomfortable in her snug retreat, and, from being amused at seeing him there in the rain, grew vexed, without understanding that this vexation was another name for anxiety.

"Your hat is spoiling, Mr. Keith," she said at last, with a sense of injury upon her.

"Is it?"

He took it off and examined it leisurely, while



the rain fell heavily and slowly upon his uncovered head—such a handsome head!

“It will bear a little more,” he added, replacing it.

“I wish you would go back,” she began again, presently; “I’m quite comfortable, but you are not.”

“I think I have the better position,” maintained Royden coolly. “Your atmosphere has a mustiness about it which I do not envy.”

Another pause.

“Do go!” exclaimed the girl pettishly. “Everybody will be wondering where you are, and there will be such a fuss!”

“I like a fuss,” said Royden, quietly; “and so do you.”

“Indeed I don’t!” asserted Honor, in hot haste. “I cannot bear a fuss. What do you mean, Mr. Keith?” she asked, venturing forward a little in her den. “What makes you say I like a fuss?”

“I see you do.”

“You are very unjust!” cried Honor, rousing herself into a state of wrath which she all the time knew to be utterly childish. “You say it

just because you want to be in the house. Please to go.'

"I will," said Royden, calmly, "when I want to be in the house."

"You are quite wet," cried Honor, calming down a little, and feeling very small and powerless to impress him in any way with her own anger.

"Yes. Are you as wet?"

"Oh, much wetter, of course. You have an overcoat. I had nothing over this thin dress."

A look of anxiety, swift as thought, passed over Royden's face; but his next words were rather more leisurely even than they had been, and therefore of course more successful.

"The others will be amused, Miss Craven, to see you in there. Mr. Haughton is coming towards us now. Don't stir yet. Captain Trent is walking in this direction too. Now you may enjoy the pleasure of a fuss."

Without another word, Honor stepped from the hollow tree,—her blue cloak failing to hide the limp appearance of her dress and spoiled hat—and coolly Royden took his place beside her.

"How do you feel now?" he inquired presently, glancing down upon her.

"Hungry, thank you."

"I wish he hadn't come," she said to herself, petulantly; "I would rather any one else had found me."

Yet, when she joined them all, under a heavy fire of sympathy and astonishment and blame, she looked up into Royden's quiet, amused face, and—so variable is a woman's mind—wished they had all treated the matter just as he had treated it.

"Oh, Honor, I'm so glad I did not come!" exclaimed Phoebe, ruefully.

"So am I," returned Honor, pleasantly, as she looked from Phoebe's showy dress down to her own wet garments.

"This sort of thing adds considerably to the expense of a pic-nic," observed Jane Haughton.

"Don't take any more notice, please, Jane," whispered the girl, in real and earnest entreaty, as she took her tea standing in her cloak; "my dress was not new, and I dare say it will wash."

"Come, Honor," put in Lawrence, "I must put you on more than that cloak."


"I don't want more," said Honor, shrinking from his touch. "Oh, Lawrence, how I do hate to be taken care of in this way," she added, as he hovered about her. "I like to be forgotten. It is such a relief to feel that nobody knows or cares anything about one."

Not by very many was Honor the only one who, in impatient youth, has felt this strongly, because the care they received was not the care they loved. And they do not think that there may come a time when all such random words will sting with a keen, reproachful memory.

"You shall have a dress of mine when we reach Deergrove, Honor," said Theodora, looking with placidity on the girl's limp figure. "Oh, Mr. Keith, see how wet your hat is; it left quite a little pool when you took it up. That's through Honor—how vexatious!"

"Most vexatious," assented Royden, looking critically down upon the wet hat. "As an Englishman, this disaster touches me in a sensitive spot."

"Are you *really* an Englishman?" inquired



Theodora, evidently glad of this vent for a little of her overflowing but suppressed curiosity.

"Is it not proved by my anxiety for my hat? Hat-worship belongs to no other nation. Don't you notice in England how a man's first and deepest care is always bestowed upon his hat?"

"Especially in church," added Mr. Haughton, flippantly. "Before he seats himself he breathes into it a prayer for its safety—and that's about the only time he looks really devout through the service."

"But, though you may be really an Englishman, Mr. Keith," persisted Miss Trent, "you must have been very much abroad."

"Yes. Don't you think, Miss Craven, that your hat is in as bad a plight as mine? It does not look nearly so tall as Miss Owen's now."

"Phoebe thinks a hat cannot be too tall for *her*," remarked Mr. Haughton, superciliously.

"Very wise, Miss Phoebe," said Royden, gravely. "Paddy's tall hat was the means of saving his life, if you recollect. A bullet passed through the top of his high hat. 'There,' said Paddy, complacently, as he examined the hole, 'if I'd had a low hat, that bullet would have

gone right through my head.' We should always choose tall hats, shouldn't we, Miss Owen?"

No suspicion crossed the mind of anyone of his reason for talking thus.

"Honor," said Mrs. Payte, when the rain was over, and the carriages were coming round to the door in the gathering twilight, "take this large shawl of mine; I have wraps enough. You are coming with us in Mr. Keith's dog-cart—you and Mr. Romer. Lady Somerson and Mrs. Romer are snug together in the Somerson carriage, and we go so fleetly behind those beautiful horses. And then," added the little lady, betraying her motive, "you can stop at The Larches and change your dress."

"Oh! no," said Honor; "I——"

"You dare not venture—eh?" inquired the little old lady, shrewdly.

"Theodora says she will lend me a dress," amended the girl.

"Yes, so she will," remarked Mrs. Payte, dryly, "and a nice baggy old thing it will be. Don't I see how she is enjoying the idea of it even now? She won't let you rival her to-

night, be sure, child. Never mind, there is a beaut——”

“Mrs. Payte,” put in Theodora, appearing at that moment, and graciously addressing the little old lady, of whose very existence she had all day endeavoured to be unaware, “would you not like to change places with me for the drive to Deergrove? You will meet the wind in the seat you occupied in coming, whereas mine is a sheltered seat.”

“This is a thoughtful idea of yours, Miss Trent,” returned the old lady, meditatively, “nevertheless I like the seat I occupied in coming.”

“But you would be so comfortable, mamma says, in our carriage.”

“I shall be comfortable in Mr. Keith’s, thank you.”

“It is so chilly to-night,” urged Theodora. “Had you not better change your mind?”

“No, nor my place,” said the little lady, emphatically. “I shall drive back as I drove here, thank you—behind Mr. Keith’s splendid horses, and side by side with him. He is a clever man, and we get on admirably; now and then talking

Shakespeare and the musical glasses, and now and then 'cooing and billing, like Philip and Mary on a shilling.' No, I have no wish for a change."

Theodora's head was at a lofty elevation when she turned away, and her muttered "Odious!" was not confined to her own ears alone.

"Her exertions for my welfare are unselfish," observed Mrs. Payte, dryly, "and her motive inscrutable."

"Honor Craven was so bent on being driven by you, Mr. Keith," remarked Theodora, as he assisted her into her carriage, "that we other girls had no chance at all, even if we had wished it."

"Which of course, Miss Trent, you did not."

"But of course I did," she pouted, declining to see that he wished to drop the subject, "only all girls are not so forward as Honor."

"Miss Craven," said Royden, with proud quietness, "has not even yet consented to take that vacant seat in my dog-cart—I wish she would."

No word further could Theodora say. She leaned back in her corner of the carriage, and during the drive, hardly uttered a sentence, either to her mother or to Hervey; her only consolation being the thought that, in the garb destined for her, Honor Craven would present a spectacle slightly at variance with the dainty figure which she had always mildly chafed to see about the rooms where she wished to reign, but which, since she had known Royden Keith, excited every jealous and spiteful passion in her languid nature.

"There—that will be our last glimpse of Abbotsmoor for a time," said the Rector, speaking to Honor with rather unusual gravity, as the dog-cart rolled smoothly under the trees of the avenue; "it is a beautiful place, and I hope the tragedy we have been recalling to-day, will be the last to throw its shadow over it."

She turned and looked up into his face, surprised.

"Of course it will be the last, Mr. Romer. What other could there be?"

"My dear," said the Rector, in a thoughtful tone, which told Honor that something had

vexed him that day, "there will be tragedies enacted so long as jealousy and envy are allowed to be unbridled passions. Let us do our best to keep our hearts free from them."

CHAPTER XI.

So Love does raine
 In stoutest minds, and maketh monstrous warre,
 He maketh warre : he maketh peace againe,
 And yet his peace is but continuall jarre ;
 O miserable men that to him subject arre !

SPENSER.

THE daylight had quite faded when the picnic party reached Deergrove, and the rain had made the air so chilly that they were not sorry to see fires in the handsome, unhomely rooms.

"Of course you must change your dress, Honor," remarked Theodora, joining her in the hall. "Come up to my room."

Honor was not there long. Almost as soon as the other guests, who had been upstairs only to wash their hands, was she down again, sipping her tea at the drawing-room fire; and, of

all the involuntary laughter which her appearance provoked, her own was the most full of merriment; although she knew there was many a dress Theodora might have lent her, of which the misfit or unsuitableness would have been scarcely perceptible, while in this it was very painfully so.

"Theodora, my dear," blandly commented Mrs. Trent, levelling her glass, "how odd Honor looks in that dress."

Theodora smiled a gentle assent, but forbore to press her advantage just then.

Still, Honor, even in her questionable garb, was not to be repressed. It almost seemed as if she had determined that, in defiance of the unpicturesque and unbecoming dress, she would be to-night the rival whom Theodora fancied she had annihilated; yet such an intention was in reality far from her thoughts. In her girlish light-heartedness, and in that intense power of enjoyment possessed by those who are endowed with a keen perception, alike of the beautiful and the ludicrous, Honor's merriment was real merriment, and therefore infectious. Random she might have been in her fun, but flippant

never; nor did one word of unkindness pass the laughing lips.

"I like to see young people capable of thoroughly enjoying themselves," observed Mrs. Payte to the Rector, as he joined her on her couch. "Is it the remnant of an age that's past, or is it the foreshadowing of an age to come? Look at Theodora Trent, the model of this age. Why, she might have been in her present position for a hundred years, for any freshness it possesses for her."

"The age does very well," said the Rector, asserting the truth good-humouredly. "Honor may look as bored and languid as Miss Trent when she has been in society as long."

"Watch Mr. Haughton throwing straws against the wind," said the little old lady, after a pause. "He was mad with Honor just now, and when he had spoken to her he took up a book to pretend to read, and his hand shook as I only fancied a man's hand could shake in a novel. I'm glad to see that Hervey Trent looks more in his element here than he did about the rooms at Abbotsmoor."

"Probably because the carpets were up at

Abbotsmoor," laughed the Rector. "Trent is pre-eminently a carpet-knight."

"Pre-eminently," repeated Mrs. Payte, her shrewd eyes following Captain Hervey's slight, inert figure, "and I remember an old Spanish proverb which says a soldier had better smell of gunpowder than musk."

"Theodora, my dear," spoke Mrs. Trent, acting as prompted by her daughter, and as cleverly as long practice could make her, "can we not have a little music? Suppose you set the example."

Theodora demurred, of course; but, when her mother's request had been backed anxiously by others, she took her seat at the piano with slow grace, and waited for a few seconds with folded hands, as if for an inspiration. But Miss Trent knew well what she intended to sing, before her mother's request had been uttered.

After her performance, Captain Hervey acceded to the general demand for one of his songs, and went through it very creditably. Then—for neither Mr. nor Miss Haughton understood a note of music—Phoebe was prevailed upon to delight the audience with her two-hundredth rendering of a certain reverie,

whose gliding course halted a good deal under her plump little fingers, and whose dreamy train of thought was, to say the least, jerky; but it was, of course, pronounced a pretty thing—when over.

“Miss Craven, do you not sing?”

Mr. Keith, in the very middle of Theodora's coaxing demand for a song, had turned to the girl whom Miss Trent had hitherto ignored.

“I am not a good singer,” said Honor, in her frank, bright way; “I have always been more fond of trying new music than of carefully practising.”

“You read music very easily, then?” he asked, smiling.

“Yes, *that* is easy to me; but——”

“But you will sing with me?”

“Now, Mr. Keith,” pleaded Miss Trent, from the music-stool beside them, “please come; I am going to accompany you.”

“Thank you,” said Royden, a great deal more heartily than he would have said it two minutes before, “I am ready; and Miss Craven is going to sing too. We will have the first duet we find.”

As he spoke, he took up a copy of *Faust*, and

opened at an early duet between Faust and Marguerite—a duet which is, perhaps, not in that opera alone, but in all operas, unequalled in its graceful tenderness and its intense love.

The guests were silent, and some of them gathered about the piano, listening in rapt astonishment.

“One more!” cried Lady Somerson and the Rector in a breath, when the last notes had died away. “One more duet from the same opera!”

Royden turned the leaves, and asked Honor if she would sing the one to which he pointed. She nodded brightly, and Theodora, reading the rather difficult accompaniment with moody intentness, began again. There was no pathetic tenderness in this music, only the pathos of a wild and passionate despair; and when the last note had ceased, Honor felt a sudden heavy sadness seize her.

“I wish,” she thought to herself, with inexplicable longing, “that we had sung that first. I wish the other had come last. That was so beautiful and happy—this is so sorrowful, so sorrowful!”

Of course Theodora insisted on Mr. Keith's singing duets with her afterwards, while Honor was very glad to sit apart unnoticed; and when at last Royden sang alone the exquisite tenor solo, "*Versa nel mio*,"—so much more beautiful and tender, if well sung to a piano, than it is upon the stage—she bent her head upon the book she pretended to read, and silenced Hervey, almost with a sob, when he began whispering to her. But when all the music was over, the mood left her.

"Honor,"—It was some little time after this, and Mrs. Payte had caught the girl standing, gazing silently at Theodora and her mother,—
"what are you puzzling over?"

"I was wondering," Honor answered, without hesitation, "how I should entertain if I were rich—at least how I should *try* to do it. What a silly idea it was!" added the girl, with sudden recollection.

"Very silly," acknowledged the old lady, speaking so loudly that the colour mounted in Honor's face. "But, by the way, that reminds me that I have a little fortune-teller upstairs, in my satchel. Mrs. Disbrowe—poor thing! all

her little vagaries are excusable—made it, and asked me to bring it to amuse you. All I want to know is, who's to believe it? You'll see how inappropriate the mottoes are sure to be. Fetch it, Honor, and let's see what it tells us. This is the sort of time to be silly, if one ever should be."

"Oh, yes, let's have our fortunes told," cried Phoebe, ecstatically, while Honor ran upstairs.

"Yes, certainly our fortunes," seconded Theodora, with a little approach to energy. "Mr. Keith, you'll have yours told?"

"Remember, I do not make the mottoes, or quite understand them, or at all believe in them," said Mrs. Payte, as Honor laid the satchel in her lap. "I brought the little fortune-teller because Selina said you might glean an atom of fun out of it."

The toy which the old lady took from her bag was a doll dressed gipsy-fashion, in the folds of whose many-coloured and voluminous paper skirts lurked what the girls looked upon as "fortunes."

She laid the little figure on her knee, as she sat in her seat beside the fire, and made the

young people wait at a respectful distance. She had in her hand a tiny gold pencil-case, which she used now and then, but always unobserved.

"Now who comes first?" she asked. "Is it you, Miss Trent?"

"Yes. You can tell me mine first, if it is likely to be true."

"*Suitable*, let us say," amended the old lady, without glancing up. "You have the first choice of the numbers. There are but nine here altogether, so they will but just go round."

"I choose number one," said Theodora, with her slow, conscious smile.

"Number one," repeated Mrs. Payte, very deliberately, as she pulled out a dark blue fold of the many-coloured skirts. "This is what is said on number one: '*The hearts of old gave hands, but our new heraldry is hands, not hearts.*' I really do not know," continued the old lady, still without looking up, "what poet Selina has taken that from, but you see how inapplicable it is, don't you? Am I to read any more?"

"Oh! yes, please," cried Phoebe, while one or

two of the others were silent, wondering over Theodora's choice.

"Then you choose," said Mrs. Payte, looking observantly up into Phoebe's face, "any number from two to nine."

"Seven," called Phoebe, with an excited little clasp of her hands; "seven is lucky, you know."

"Seven," echoed the fortune-teller, drawing out a pink fold. "This is what is written on seven: '*It is in woman as in soils—there is a vein of gold sometimes which the owner wots not of.*' That's an idea of Swift's, if I remember rightly. What do you think of it?"

"I don't call that a fortune," said Phoebe, ruefully.

"Now," continued Mrs. Payte, smiling, as she refolded the pink paper, "who comes next? You, Miss Haughton?"

"No indeed."

"Yes, please, Miss Haughton," urged Royden, in his pleasant tones; "let us all take our turn."

"I think it nonsense," returned Jane, coldly;

"but, if I must be as foolish as all the others, I'll say nine."

"Nine—nine—I can hardly read nine," muttered the old lady, bending over a yellow fold. "It is a couple of lines from Tennyson.

'Dark is the world to thee—
Thyself art the reason why.'

I suppose," she muttered, "it isn't to be expected that any single one will be appropriate. Now, Honor, it is your turn. Of course yours won't be suitable either. Stupid institution, isn't it? Choose your number—any one from two to eight, except seven, which is taken."

"Eight, please. What colour is it, Mrs. Payte?"

"Don't be impatient and inquisitive," retorted the old lady, glancing shrewdly up into the girl's bright face, as she drew out a strip of sky blue from the gipsy's dress. "This is all there is to read to you :

'She's beautiful, and therefore to be wooed ;
She is a woman, therefore to be won.'

A bit from *King Henry VI.* How absurd!"

"Yes—very absurd," said Honor, laughing; but she had blushed a little too, when she had met the eyes of Mr. Keith.

"What a hit!" ejaculated Captain Trent. "Give me as true a hit, Mrs. Payte. I say number three. I wonder no one has chosen number three before."

"Do you?" said Mrs. Payte, absently, drawing out a white fold of the thick glazed paper. "We will conclude—shall we?—that it has been specially reserved for you. Here it is. Listen: '*I am not settled yet in any stable condition; but lie wind-bound off the Cape of Good Hope, expecting some gentle gale to launch me out.*' That's a quotation from Howell; silly man to lie there, eh?—wind-bound off the Cape of Good Hope."

"Perhaps old Myddelton's money has that to answer for," said Honor, in a tone of deep consideration.

"Why, Honor, you baby," remarked Theodora, "you speak as if this rubbish were true. Mr. Keith, you will not be so silly as to try any number, will you?"

"I cannot settle to anything," said Royden, with gravity, "until I know my motto. Please, Mrs. Payte, give me number five."

"Yes, you can have five," assented the old lady, drawing out a crimson paper; "but—but—let me see, I can scarcely detect the meaning of this. It is Byronic—*Manfred*, I fancy—

'I feel the impulse, yet I do not plunge;
I feel the peril, yet do not recede;
And my brain reels, and yet my foot is firm.'

"Why, Mr. Keith," cried Theodora, a few minutes afterwards, "how silent you are over your motto! It might be your destiny, for the grave look upon your face."

"Now, Mrs. Payte," exclaimed Phoebe, "please read Mr. Haughton's."

"Will you choose your number, Lawrence?" asked Honor, rather enjoying the idea; and at her words he chose it.

"Number six, if I really am to choose."

"Number six," repeated Mrs. Payte, musingly, as she slowly—very slowly—opened a green paper. "Dear me, this is all that's said on number six—

'Love he comes, and Love he tarries,
Just as fate or fancy carries—
Longest stays when sorest chidden,
Laughs and flies when pressed and bidden.'

I have heard that verse before, so have you, of course. Well, is that all?"

"I am going to choose a number for Mrs. Payte herself," said the Rector, laughing; "and by that we shall judge how true her axioms are. Now, Mrs. Payte, I choose four for you; please read it."

The old lady opened a brown fold of paper, and bent to read, with her eyes full of laughter.

"This is rather trying," she said, looking sharply up into the surrounding faces. "This is what it says—

'Whether she knows the thing or no,
Her tongue eternally will go,
For she has impudence at will.'

To begin with, it is a distortion of Gay's lines, which were originally applied to the masculine gender; and, to end with, its inapplicability is as apparent as in the other cases. For goodness' sake, burn the creature, some of you!"

"Mrs. Payte," asked Honor, a suspicion darting across her mind, "are the numbers really there?"

The old lady raised her head, and eyed Honor sternly.

"Of course they are there. Take it and see."

She was quite right; the verses exactly answered to the numbers everyone had chosen; and it never entered into Honor's head to conjecture *when* the pencilled figures had been added over the quotations. "Thank you," she said, handing back the toy; "it is very odd."

"Honor," interposed Theodora, evidently tired of the subject, "we are going to dance now. You are fond of performing dance music, so I suppose you will play first."

Honor took her seat at the piano, and at once struck up a valse. Mr. Keith, as in duty bound, offered his arm to Theodora.

On and on went Honor, until her fingers ached; then she stopped with a rich, swift chord, and turned on her stool, smiling to picture the sudden stop; but Theodora and her partner were the only two who had kept up so long as the music.

"How spiteful of you!" whispered Miss Trent, coming up to her alone. "You stopped on purpose, because I was enjoying it."

"I thought everyone was enjoying it—except me," said Honor, naïvely; "but my wrists gave way."

"Will you dance now, Miss Craven?"

Theodora turned, her eagerness evident through all her studied composure.

"You will offend Honor if you take her away from the piano, Mr. Keith. Her musical strength lies in dances."

"And in singing as Marguerite," added Royden, with a smile into Honor's eyes.

"Oh, I did that very badly," said Honor, turning swiftly away; "I will do this better."

And without another moment's pause, she played the opening bars of the Lancers. Then followed other dances, and still Honor was allowed to keep her seat at the piano. Once or twice Lawrence, in his stiff, stern way, proposed that some one else should take a turn; but not very eagerly, for he did not care to dance, and he could be more sure of having her near him while she played. Once or twice Captain Trent

sauntered to her side, and whispered what a cool thing it was of Theodora; but he had not the courage to venture this remark to Miss Trent herself, so its only effect was a comical expression from Honor as she played on. Once or twice the Rector took Phoebe to the piano and proposed a division of labour, but Honor knew how Phoebe bungled over dance-music, and so she only nodded smilingly, and still played on. And once Mr. Keith, in the hearing of all the room, inquired coolly if it was not the turn of some one else to play.

"If I offered to play," explained Theodora, in a low tone, "Honor would not let me. She objects to dancing in boots that are not her own."

"I see," said Royden, with a quizzical gravity in his eyes.

But in another moment he was to see quite the opposite side of the picture. Little Mrs. Payte marched up to the piano, and declared, in a tone which there was no gainsaying, that Honor would much oblige her by resigning.

"I never heard such ugly things as these tunes of the present day!" she said. "Let me

show you what was called dance-music when I was young."

Honor rose with evident relief and pleasure but first she looked questioningly into the old lady's face.

"Are you sure, Mrs. Payte, that you do not say it because I have looked tired or discontented?"

"Sure," she rejoined, tersely, and sat down at once.

Lawrence rose from his lounge behind the piano.

"You will dance with me, Honor?"

"Yes," she said, so brightly and readily that Royden "saw" a little more clearly still through the excuse of the boots.

"Honor, how odious this music is!" observed Theodora pointedly, when the valse was over. "I cannot dance to it."

"Can you not? Oh, I can."

Mrs. Payte was far more determined about not giving up her occupation at the piano than even Honor had been. She sat there, tripping through the old-fashioned airs, with her wrists very much elevated, and her fingers very light

upon the keys ; but no one save the daughter of the house uttered a word against the performance.

“ I can dance merrily to those quaint old airs —can’t you ?” asked Honor, appealing daringly to Theodora. “ And I never knew anyone keep better time than Mrs. Payte. “ How kind it is of her !”

And Honor evidently felt every word she said, for, in all her happy excitement and restless enjoyment, she never forgot to thank the old lady, and offer earnestly to relieve her.

“ Go on,” nodded the little pianist, working away indefatigably. “ I like it. I don’t intend to be turned out in favour of your new-fangled style. Go on.”

Honor indeed went on, and the brighter and merrier she grew, the more coldly supercilious were the glances bestowed upon her by Miss Trent ; the more appalling was Miss Haughton’s gaze of disapproval ; the more Lawrence expanded in her smiles ; the more Hervey caught himself up in his corrections and lectures, as if he feared her sudden flight from their midst ; the more Phoebe raised her eyebrows with mild

astonishment ; the more Mrs. Trent made languid remarks of displeasure at " girls who let their spirits run away with them ;" the more Lady Somerson smiled behind her hand-screen, following with her eyes the light, restless figure, which was so beautiful despite its ill-fitting dress ; and the more Royden Keith studied, with quiet amusement, the changing face of this girl, who seemed as yet to possess so little knowledge of the world which had set its seal upon his thoughtful face.

" You do not often see girls make themselves ridiculous, just as Honor does to-night, do you, Mr. Keith ?"

Theodora had paused beside him as he leaned against the chimney watching the dancers—watching one especially, as Miss Trent plainly saw. He looked down and answered her, his eyes growing full of fun as their intentness vanished ; he looked down and answered her truthfully, but as he would rather have died than answer her, if he could have foreseen how and when she would report and distort his words.

" Very seldom."

"That is what I cannot understand in Honor's nature," continued Theodora, placidly insinuating the wide contrast in her own; "her perfect incapacity for any serious thought and feeling. She is rather pretty, and, as Hervey says, she is amusing sometimes; but she is not at all one you could fancy at the head of an establishment, or, indeed, moving in any wider range of society. As mamma says"—Theodora was gaining courage from the uncontradicting face—"any man would be unwise to bestow a strong affection upon Honor, if he expected depth of affection in return; do you think so too?"

"That it would be unwise for some men to bestow a strong affection upon Miss Craven? Yes."

It was at this moment, just as Theodora smiled assent to his words, that Honor herself came up to them, with Lawrence following her to entreat her hand for the next dance.

"Honor, you are making yourself rather oddly conspicuous, are you not?" inquired Theodora, in a would-be whisper. "We were wondering to see you."

Honor glanced up into Royden's face with a gaze of swift and pained inquiry, while the soft pink deepened in her cheeks.

"Honor bright."

So he answered quietly, with his rare smile; but, when the two words had been thus involuntarily uttered, a dusky flush rose in his face; and his eyes, meeting hers, asked pardon for the jest. No one had noticed her blush, or the sudden brightening of her eyes, but everyone could see that no words of his had vexed her.

Lawrence led her off in pride again, and the young face was once more the brightest and the happiest in the room. For a while Lawrence Haughton's jealousy lay sleeping, but his sister redoubled the keenness of her watch, and Theodora redoubled her quiet words and glances of contempt. By force of contrast, Miss Trent appeared almost genial to Jane and Phoebe that night. Jane was so harmless in her easy chair, and Phoebe so insignificant in her small, gushing amiability, that Theodora Trent, in her graciousness, could afford to patronize these two unhurtful guests; only repaying herself by a

few sleepy words of jesting contempt, uttered now and then beyond their hearing.

Only Mr. Keith and Captain Trent received any amount of attention from the daughter of their hostess, and, though Hervey was quite aware of the inferior quality and quantity dealt out to him, he did not fret over it. He could not, just yet, feel any unpleasant consciousness of inferiority in the presence of his possible rival, perhaps from the fact that Hervey Trent was too thoroughly an artificial man to appreciate the intense reality of Royden's nature.

"Mr. Keith"—little Mrs. Payte, from her seat at the piano, without turning her head, called him as he passed near, and he paused, standing beside her; it was a lull between the dances, and her fingers were striking only a few idle chords—"were you going to ask Honor to dance?"

"No."

"Why not? Because of that clumsy dress Theodora chose to lend her, or the boots that do not fit?"

"No," he answered, rather gravely, following

the moving fingers on the keys, "not for that reason."

"She is as pretty in her ugly gown," resumed the old lady, energetically, "as Theodora in her falbala."

"Falbala!" he echoed, laughing. "How strange to hear that word! I heard it last in Spanish America."

"It's a common enough word," rejoined the old lady, testily, "among those who are not solely English. It belongs to Spain and Italy and France—don't fancy it peculiar to South America, pray—and it is more natural to me than the stupid, distorted word 'furbelows,' which these girls use. Isn't it sad," she added, with a quick change of tone, and a keen, upward glance, "to see Honor Craven exciting herself so childishly, in spite of Captain Trent's repeated reprimands?"

"Captain Trent is not wearing himself out," said Royden, in a leisurely tone. "Captain Trent is one of those lucky individuals who are able to stroll through life."

"And they are the wisest, too," asserted Mrs. Payte, with unmistakable emphasis. "Why

should men gallop through life—as some do?”

“Or trip through it—as some women do?” said Royden, with a smile.

“Or stalk through it, as some other women do?” added the little old lady, with a sly, swift glance at Miss Haughton. “Have you asked *her* to dance?”

“Yes, I have asked Miss Haughton, and she refused me—as you did.”

“For my reason, probably. One evening of dancing would leave me like the Dutch skipper who came home so thin that his wife and his sister could not both look at him at the same time.”

“Ten minutes ago,” she presently resumed, playing a little louder, “I heard Miss Haughton wondering to Miss Trent why she invited that disagreeable little Mrs. Payte here. And on whom do you think our hostess laid the iniquity?”

“On me, if she did me justice,” said Royden, pleasantly.

“Yes; on you. I was your guest for the day, she said; and I of course was obliged to be invited. How do you feel?”

"Decidedly better."

"Then now you are going to ask Honor Craven to dance this valse? I remember a tune that will set her feet flying, even in big boots."

"Why do you wish it?" he asked, rather gravely, as his eyes went swiftly across the room in their search for Honor.

"For two reasons. She is a good dancer—old women are not always so blind as you imagine—and I want you to have one thoroughly pleasant dance before we go. Honor's height will just suit you. Go and try."

He turned at once and went, his eyes still fixed upon her in her distant corner, and a great pleasure and anticipation in their depths. He came up to her just as she stood, alone and quite still, against the open door; and he saw that her face had for that moment lost its brilliant merri-ment, and her beautiful eyes were full of quiet thought.

"Are you very tired?"

He spoke quietly, but his voice scattered the thought in a moment.

"No, not tired," she said, and simply and

unaffectedly she put her hand within his offered arm.

"This is the last dance, I believe. Will you give it to me?"

She only smiled without a word, and they took their places. It was a long valse: Mrs. Payte's busy fingers went from one old air to another untiringly; yet among all the dancers, strange to say, it was Honor who stopped first—Honor who had seemed so restless and unwearying.

"I had no idea I was so tired," she said, her hand trembling in his clasp; "let us stop now."

Royden looked down, an anxious surprise in his eyes.

"Was it painful to you to dance with me?"

She shook her head and laughed. It was a gesture of curious self-reproach, and the laugh was a little forced.

"No, no," she said, "but—I do not know how it was—there came a sudden pain; swift enough, for it is gone now; but it was heavy and miserable, like a foreboding."

"Rest for a moment here at the window. See what a beautiful night it is!"

She heaved a soft little sigh, possibly in her relief because he had not laughed at her childish and almost superstitious idea, possibly in thorough enjoyment of the rest and calm.

The dancing for a long time went on behind them, as they stood in silence looking out on the dim autumn night ; but it stopped at last.

“Are you rested ? Are you quite rested ?”

As he spoke, he softly touched the hand that lay upon his arm, and she looked up with a smile to meet his questioning eyes.

“Quite rested, and that pain is gone.”

He did not answer, but she knew that some strong emotion which she could not fully comprehend, found utterance in that one slow, long-drawn breath.

The valse was over, and Mrs. Payte's shrewd eyes were turned from the piano. She saw the dancers separate and mingle with the other occupants of the room, breaking then into groups of twos and threes, with here and there perhaps one solitary figure left out, as was her own just then ; though the brisk little old lady did not give that fact the faintest shadow of regret. She took her isolation so little to heart that she

found herself able to cull a racy amusement, as usual, from the remarks which her keen ears received in an illicit manner.

"What makes you look so absent, Honor?"

"I am not absent," said the girl, turning her head from Lawrence Haughton when he joined her with these words.

"I said you looked absent, which is true."

"What does it signify how I look?" she asked, appealing to him with a sadness underlying her impatience. "I wish you would not look at me, Lawrence—why should you?"

"Let me look at whom I may," he answered, moodily, "it is always you I see; and that sudden thoughtful fit after your last valse was, to say the least, unlike you, Honor, and——"

"Now I must go and thank Mrs. Payte for playing for me."

"For you?" rejoined Mr. Haughton, sulkily. "The thanks are due from Theodora and her mother. Leave it to them, Honor."

"Trust Honor to make acquaintance readily with low people," remarked Theodora to Captain Trent, as she sauntered with him up to where her mother sat. "Doesn't she look

absurd, laying herself out to that old—to that extent?” corrected Miss Trent, uncomfortably conscious of Royden’s presence.

“Yes—oh yes, of course,” assented Captain Hervey, obeying very readily his cousin’s command to look at Honor. “She looks pretty, doesn’t she? Very pretty. But of course you are right, Theo.”

CHAPTER XII.

"Seal up your lips, and give no words, but—mum."

Henry VI.

THE offices of Messrs. Carter & Haughton, solicitors, were opposite the Royal Hotel, in the most important street in Kinbury. The situation was as decidedly the best situation in the town for a lawyer's office, as Mr. Haughton was himself the most prosperous lawyer; and the rooms were so furnished and arranged as to give the visitor an impressive idea of the wide and select practice of the firm. Not that Lawrence Haughton had any partner now, but among the old clients Mr. Haughton's offices were still the offices of the firm, and Lawrence Haughton himself but a representative of it.

These offices consisted of three rooms. A small one on the ground-floor, furnished with a

huge double desk, two high stools, two maps, two odd chairs, and two jocular and rather idle clerks, who spent six hours of every day chatting together, and between whiles either performed in an upright hand upon Lawrence Haughton's foolscap, or drew up, with elaborate care, essays and notes, to be read, amid great applause, at the meetings of the Kinbury Young Men's Literary Association.

At the top of the short flight of stairs, two rooms opened on a lobby, and the one to the back of the house was Mr. Slimp's office, a room in which that pallid little gentleman conducted his own business as well as his employer's, and very much subdued the spirits, while assisting in the legal education, of Mr. Haughton's articled clerks. This was by no means an uncomfortable or meanly furnished room; nor was Bickerton Slimp ignorant of the art of taking his ease there, while he hatched his mean and petty plans; but the sanctum of the lawyer himself was Mr. Slimp's favourite resting-place, and on the morning of the day after the picnic at Abbotsmoor he was standing there on the rug, with an appearance as nearly approaching

to ease and at-homeness as it was in the power of his small and angular person to assume.

This private office of Mr. Haughton's was a large front room overlooking the vestibule of the Royal Hotel opposite, and no one glancing round it could fail to be impressed by the apparently limitless extent of the business entrusted to Lawrence Haughton, solicitor. How many secrets he must have held in his grasp, touching the well-known names so prominently displayed! How much he must have known of those families which Kinbury—with a wide appreciation of ancestry—called its "good families"! And, beyond that, how evident it was that he had in his keeping money as well as secrets. Yet the clients, looking ever so closely, could detect no sign of lavish or needless expenditure; and shrugging their shoulders, would pronounce Lawrence Haughton a true Myddelton at heart, possessing inherently the old man's talent of amassing wealth—this being by no means an unpleasant reflection for those whose fortunes were in his hands.

Lawrence Haughton had pushed his round-backed chair from the writing-table, and leaning

back, with his elbows on the arms, he began to fold and unfold an empty envelope, an unmistakeable sign that his conversation with his chief clerk was over. Mr. Slimp had made a movement to retire—a quite unusual proceeding with him, unless his master had shown this sign of having done with him.

“No evidence, you are quite sure, of such a name having ever been upon the records?” repeated Mr. Haughton, some suppressed excitement stirring his harsh tones.

“No proof at all, sir. A young Royden Sydney was called to the bar in 1859, but left the profession within a year.”

“That’s no evidence,” retorted Mr. Haughton, curtly; “I found that out a week ago.”

“That is the only mention of such a Christian name,” continued Mr. Slimp, in his peculiar tones of mingled deference and assurance. “As for the surname, there have been several Keiths, but not one since 1859.”

“Then this journey,” put in Mr. Haughton, impatiently, “has given you no further clue? You tell me now only exactly what you told me on Tuesday night, when you returned from London.”

"That is all I have been able to discover, sir."

Lawrence was silent for a minute, absently folding and refolding the paper in his hands, and seeing nothing of his clerk's wily glance into his brooding face. Suddenly recollecting himself, as it seemed, he wheeled his chair before his writing-table again, and, nodding towards the door, took up his pen.

Mr. Slimp walked softly across the carpeted floor, and closed the door behind him, without a sound. He should be summoned again, he knew, when any further plans were to be mooted.

Half an hour after this, Mr. Haughton opened the door of his chief clerk's office.

"I shall be out for ten minutes," he said, "not more."

He did not glance in at the lower office as he passed, but the two clerks heard his step, and looked out to see which way he went; more for the diversion of a gaze into the street, than for any lively interest they felt in the lawyer's proceedings.

"Into the Royal Hotel! What's up?"

"Bitter beer."

But it was no order for bitter beer which

Mr. Haughton gave, as he walked into the vestibule of the Royal Hotel.

"Is Mr. Keith within?" he asked of the waiter.

Now hotel waiters are, as a rule, quick and observant; and the man to whom the lawyer addressed this question was no exception. While he answered politely, "I believe he is, sir, but I will fetch his servant," he was cogitating to himself in a very different strain. "Lawyer Haughton hasn't put on that friendly air for nothing. He's never been over to see Mr. Keith before, and these aren't his usual grim tones."

He cast one more keen glance into Mr. Haughton's face when he returned with Pierce, and then he went on into the bar with an unmoved countenance.

Royden Keith rose and put down his book when Mr. Haughton, uninvited, followed the card Pierce brought in. Royden offered his hand in his easy, courteous way; but, though he showed no evidence of it, he felt a great surprise at this visit.

During the day before, both at Abbotsmoor

and Deergrove, there had been no concealment in Lawrence Haughton's suspicion and avoidance of this stranger of whom others had made so much; and Royden had felt and understood the reason of this, as only a shrewd and sensitive man can understand and feel. Therefore was this unexpected visit, so far, a puzzle to him.

Mr. Haughton declined to take a chair.

"I am expected at my office in a few minutes' time," he said, by way of excuse.

Then he paused. If, when he resolved upon this visit, he had for one moment fancied it would be easy to sound Royden Keith on the one subject which at present baffled him, his first glance this morning into the young man's face convinced him of his error. Even if *possible*, the task would be far from easy.

"Our visit to Abbotsmoor yesterday," began Lawrence, thinking it wisest to make a plunge at once, "very naturally put Gabriel Myddelton into my thoughts. This morning I find them returning to him, and so I have been looking over what papers I possess relating to his crime."

"A humiliating task, I fear."

"A very humiliating task," assented Lawrence, taking up, with inexplicable heat, those few cool words of Royden's; "but I am not here with the intention of blaming him. He is as far beyond my blame as his crime is beyond my punishment."

"Is his crime beyond your punishment?" inquired Royden, with composure. "If you find him, surely you can hang him, even now."

A flame of scarlet rose to the lawyer's brow, the very veins of his face were swollen when Royden, from his greater height, glanced calmly down upon him, reading his suspicion, but failing to read how this suppressed anger was caused by the consciousness of his feelings for Gabriel lying bare before the clear and quizzical eyes of this young man, whom *he* could not read at all.

"A thought struck me last night,"—Lawrence had, by a strong effort, shaken off his impotent wrath, and was continuing the conversation with as much ease as he could assume—"that Gabriel Myddelton might be in straitened circumstances, and, if anyone could tell us

where he was, we might be able to help him."

"Yes?" questioned Royden, in the pause, his long dark eyes fixed coolly and steadily upon the lawyer's face.

"I thought, as you have travelled much, even, as I hear, in America, you might, through your friends there, possibly make inquiries for us."

"I *have* one or two friends in America," returned Royden, in his leisurely tones; "what do you wish me to ask them?"

"I thought, as I said, that you might possibly make inquiries among them concerning Gabriel Myddelton."

"You mean, if they can be trusted in such a case?"

"Of course, of course," exclaimed Lawrence, hastily, wondering why he could not frame his words here, and on this subject, just as he could on matters of law in his own office; "I mean, if you know any who can be trusted."

"If I do," said Royden, slowly, "what then?"

"If, through them, we could send out help to Gabriel—always providing that his identity were assured—we should be willing to do so."

With these words, the lawyer raised his eyes boldly. The younger man could hardly answer quite easily here, if his visitor's one haunting and damning suspicion were well-founded.

"Have you, then, reason to believe that he went to America?"

"I have reason to believe that he landed in Quebec; but I did not hear this until it was years too late to be of service."

"Too late to capture him?"

Again the hot flame of anger burned in Lawrence Haughton's face.

"Am I not trying," he said, "to help this most degraded connection of my own?"

But for the eager, intense desire he felt to assure himself of the correctness of this suspicion of his, Lawrence would have uttered no further words on this subject. As it was, though, he would bear any words his companion might choose to say, rather than resign the chance of some day proving him a convicted and escaped criminal.

"I never spent a day in Quebec in my life," said Royden, steadily studying the lawyer's

hard, embarrassed face, "so I have unfortunately no friends there to whom I can appeal on behalf of your generous plan. I have one friend, a miner, in Peru. Shall I apply to him for possible tidings of your cousin?"

"Mr. Keith," said the lawyer, in only half-concealed anger, "it appears to me that you wilfully misunderstand what I wish to say. Such conduct would make a suspicious man fancy it more than possible that you yourself are cognisant of Gabriel Myddelton's hiding-place."

The one cool glance which Royden gave into the face below him, read the whole depth and width of this man's vile suspicion; but then the lesson had been slowly learned before that glance.

"You evidently understand the nature of a suspicious man," he said, with a smile.

"Will you tell me," inquired Lawrence, with a desperate last appeal, "if you think you can be of any service to me in this?"

"No, sir," rejoined Royden, gravely. "With all due deference to you, and to the law you

uphold, I would not, if I could, be an agent—however remote—in leading a free man into captivity.”

“You do not know, then, anything of Gabriel Myddelton?”

Nothing could more plainly have shown the desperate eagerness with which Lawrence Haughton sought to dive at a truth which lay beyond his reach than this persistence in his questioning of Royden Keith, and laying himself open to the cool and proud rejoinders which galled him as no rough or angry words could have done, and galled him with a hundred times their force because they were uttered by this man whom he suspected, yet against whom he could prove nothing. The man too of whom—though he hardly comprehended even himself the force, or strength, or meanness of the feeling—he was acutely and bitterly jealous, with the smallest and most despicable jealousy of which a man's mind is capable—meanly jealous of the face and figure so superior to his own; selfishly jealous of the luxuries and refinements the man possessed; angrily jealous of the mystery which surrounded him; savagely jealous,

above all, of the power he seemed to possess of winning a love for which other men might labour and sigh in vain. No feeling less strong than this contemptible and overmastering jealousy and suspicion could have made Lawrence Haughton lengthen this interview by a renewed attempt to wring a grain of some convicting truth from his companion. But he did so, and repeated and enlarged his question.


"I properly understand you—do I, Mr. Keith? You have no knowledge of the hiding-place of Gabriel Myddelton? Let me assure you that your information will be received in strictest confidence."

Royden's steadfast eyes seemed to Mr. Haughton to take in his whole mind and person in their slow, haughty glance.

"What information, may I ask, sir?"

"Any information," rejoined Lawrence, with a last effort of humility, "with which you may favour me about my cousin, Gabriel Myddelton."

"When I have information which I wish to confide to you, I will bring it you myself. I will not trouble you to seek it so urgently."



"You offered, a few minutes ago," observed the lawyer, seizing on his last faint hope of a stray advantage, "to make inquiries of your friends in South America."

"I will do so with pleasure. By what name may I inquire for your cousin?"

"By what name?" replied Lawrence, gazing half stupefied into the cool, quizzical face above him, and wondering how it was that every word this man uttered went to strengthen his suspicion, yet every glance and tone to weaken it.

"Yes, that was my question, sir," returned Royden, quietly. "For it is not customary, I believe, even in the wilds of an unpopulated country, for a condemned criminal, who has by stratagem escaped the grip of English justice, to travel under his branded name. By what name may I inquire for your cousin?"

"You know I cannot tell!" blurted the lawyer, impotently. "A nice mockery your offer is!—you had better have made none."

"Then I will withdraw it," said Royden, glancing at the door as a footstep approached it from without.

"Of one thing I am perfectly sure," stammered Mr. Haughton, looking at his hat as if about to put it on, but making no movement towards the door; "no gentleman would speak as you have done to-day of Gabriel Myddelton and his acts, unless he had personally known something of Gabriel and those deeds of his."

"Come in."

The knock upon the door, and Mr. Keith's leisurely answer to it, alone had broken the pause which followed the lawyer's words.

"A letter, sir."

Pierce came up to his master with his noiseless step, and the lawyer hesitated in his intention to leave, watching Mr. Keith's hand as it took the letter from the tray the servant held.

"Waiting?"

"No, sir—sent by a messenger belonging to Kinbury."

Lawrence Haughton's eyes—sharpened not only by years of practice, but by the distrust which every moment grew upon him—rested greedily upon the envelope which Royden held, without attempting to open; but they rested

there in vain, for all their keenness ; and one fancy, which had been hovering tauntingly about him, laid hold of Mr. Haughton's mind now as a mortifying conviction. Below all the quiet, rather amused ease of the young man before him lay a will far stronger than his own, a power more dominant ; and—above all humiliating to the lawyer, who built so great pretensions on his reserve—a sight so much keener, and a knowledge so much truer, that his motives and suspicions had all been laid bare in this interview, which had shown *him* nothing.

Was it any wonder that Lawrence Haughton, being the man he was, should suspect that an infamous truth lay hidden somewhere ; and should vow within himself that he would drag this truth to light ?

There was no sign of Royden's opening the letter, and Lawrence had no excuse to stay longer.

"Good morning, Mr. Keith," he said, and made rather an unnecessary show of offering his hand.

"Good morning, sir," said Royden, with a slight, unconcerned bow.

Before the lawyer had reached the vestibule of the hotel, a sudden resolution formed itself from the jarring discords of mistrust and jealousy which swayed his mind. Slowly he retraced his steps, and, following immediately on the slightest signal of his approach which courtesy allowed, he entered Mr. Keith's room once more.

It was empty, but Mr. Haughton thought he would wait for a few moments, so he sauntered over to the hearth, and, as he framed to himself the speech intended for Royden's ear, he stood with his eyes lowered.

Suddenly and swiftly a change came into his face. Stooping upon the rug, and stretching forth his cautious white fingers, he took something from the grate, and placed this something within the crown of the hat he carried.

"I see how it is," he said to himself, in self-congratulation; "he threw it there to burn, little guessing that the ashes would tell secrets, I think I will not stay now."

But Mr. Haughton had, with miraculous suddenness, to repress his smile of delight, and once more change his tactics, when, as he turned

to leave the room, he encountered Royden Keith.


"I returned," he said, with a little unusual suavity in his harsh tones, "to beg that, if you think it dangerous in any way to move in the matter of discovering Gabriel Myddelton's name and place of concealment, you will not, for a moment, think of doing so."

"Danger to himself or to me?" inquired Royden, in a tone of quiet irony.

The old bewilderment was falling upon Lawrence Haughton's brain once more, but there was now the pleasant consciousness of what he carried in his hat.

"Your question is odd," he said, with a curious smile. "For whom could there be danger but for the felon himself?"

"Oh! that is the law, is it? Danger only for the felon himself. That's well. Then listen, Mr. Haughton. I did not, as you are quite aware, promise you help in discovering his name and hiding-place; your return, therefore, to insinuate danger to him was unnecessary. But your courteous and well-disguised insinuation of danger to *myself* has given a zest



to the idea for me, and I will now promise you to do what you desire, and be *myself* the one to bring you and Gabriel Myddelton face to face."

"If you do, you know the consequence," said Lawrence, between his teeth.

"The consequence will naturally be the carrying out of that long-delayed sentence of the law."

"Certainly. Though, as I said before," added Lawrence, hastily, "if I knew him to be in a distant country, trying to be a better man, I would wish to offer him help."

"You are generous," remarked Royden, drily; and then the two men separated.

"I know nothing more than I knew when I went in," muttered the lawyer to himself, as he descended the stairs for the second time; "but still I have something now which may be a proof."

Entering his own office, without having addressed either of his clerks on his way, Mr. Haughton turned the key in the door behind him. Then, taking his usual seat before his writing-table, he cautiously drew the burned paper from his

hat. It was but a small torn piece which he had rescued, and it was burnt perfectly black, but upon it he could read, in white, two written words.

“Science would explain this in a moment,” smiled Lawrence, locking the paper carefully in a private drawer, “and tell why, as that peculiar paper burnt to tinder without entirely crumbling away, and its whiteness turned to blackness, the ink should, on the contrary, turn from black to white, and fulfil its mission still, by forming the words in its strong contrast. But I do not need it explained by science. Here the words stand, and that is enough for me. When the time comes, they may be proof enough; and in the meantime they are safe here.”

CHAPTER XIII.

Unless you can swear, "For life, for death,"
Oh, fear to call it loving!

E. B. BROWNING.

IN spite of Mrs. Payte's sharp rebukes and muttered grumbings, Honor Craven acted upon the permission given her, and spent much time at East Cottage, soothing and cheering, as far as possible, the wakeful hours of the invalid whose only constant companion seemed so harsh and unfeeling. Yet those visits to the cottage were by no means easy of accomplishment for Honor. Far from being her own mistress, to spend there what time she would, and come and go as she chose, there were continual difficulties put in her way, both by her guardian and his sister. Lawrence selfishly forbade her to be out after

six o'clock, when he himself came home ; and Miss Haughton considered that there were a hundred things she might be doing more useful and sensible than "dancing attendance" on a perfect stranger.

"Why don't you mend your stockings?" she would inquire, when Honor, her morning duties over, would beg permission to go.

"They don't want mending, Jane."

"Well, Phoebe's always want double mending ; so why don't you help her?" would be the grumbling remark.

"Oh ! let me go—do, Jane ; Mrs. Disbrowe is so very ill," the girl would plead, without uttering one impatient word at Jane's proposal, though she knew that Phoebe's mending always fell entirely upon her own quick fingers.

If at last she did succeed in getting off, she must—however much she felt herself of use at the cottage—be home again for the six o'clock dinner, or incur her guardian's moody displeasure, and in so doing bring down upon herself a perfect torrent of tears from Phoebe, and Miss Haughton's blackest looks and grimmest words. So this new task which Honor had taken upon

herself was not so easy a one as Mrs. Payte seemed to fancy, when she would meet the girl's bright face at the cottage window, and ask her sharply how many of her day's duties she had left undone. The answers always had been so truthful that even this sceptical old lady could not doubt the truth of the one which at last took the place of all others—

“None left undone to-day, Mrs. Payte. I was up early, and everything is done.”

Sometimes, receiving this bright answer, Mrs. Payte caught herself smiling into the girl's earnest eyes—but only sometimes. The answer generally met with a grunt of sceptical surprise, and, but that Honor looked for no thanks, her heart might have grown idle or rebellious in this task. But it never did; and when a month was gone, and October was drawing to its close, Honor was still fulfilling this one duty, her soft voice and step untiring, and her gentle hands unfailing, in their prompt and loving service.

One afternoon, when Honor reached the cottage—Miss Haughton had kept her at home all the morning, darning tablecloths with Phoebe,

whose propensity was to keep a novel under her work, and imbibe its contents surreptitiously while her younger cousin worked—she found Theodora Trent with Mrs. Payte in the cottage parlour. Miss Trent had made her duty-call as brief as possible, and now was relieved to feel that the ten minutes were over, and she might depart.

“I am very sorry to hear Mrs. Disbrowe is so ill; I hope we shall soon have better tidings of her.”

So she was saying, in her languid tones, when Honor entered the room; and the cold wish, so impossible of fulfilment, made the girl's heart feel hot and angry when she heard it.

“I hope so,” rejoined Mrs. Payte, curtly. “She's a good deal of trouble to me, as you may imagine.”

“Yes, I can imagine it,” assented Theodora.

“Anyone with sense can see how hard it is for me,” continued the little old lady, waxing wrath at the thought, “yet Honor never will own it. I only hope she will some day have

just such a place as mine to fill ; she'll understand all about it then."

The shrewd eyes raised to Theodora's face had an inexplicable twinkle in them ; and Theodora, understanding that Honor's conduct was deserving ridicule, laughed her short lazy laugh, and moved a little nearer to the door.

"So Mr. Keith is going away again?"

The words stopped Miss Trent.

"Oh, no," she said, from a lofty height of superior knowledge ; "he has been away and has returned."

"Oh, that's it, is it? I thought he was going again ; but old women are not reliable authorities ; the absurdity of *their* tales is proverbial. I don't wonder he came back, the shooting here is so good ; I don't wonder he goes away again, the air is so vile. Mr. Haughton ought to invite him to The Larches, Honor ; he would like that."

On this quizzical speech fell Miss Trent's slow cold question as she looked from one to the other.

"How do you mean? Is Honor unwomanly


enough to try to attract Mr. Keith to The Larches?"

"Unwomanly," smiled Mrs. Payte; "is Honor unwomanly, you ask? I have not known her so long as you have; please to answer your own question. I only said I thought Mr. Keith would be very glad to visit at Honor's home."

"I think not," said Theodora, answering the quizzical words with a suppressed eagerness which sounded almost like fear; "I happen to know, in fact, for Mr. Keith has expressed to me his opinion of Honor."

"What a curious thing!" said Honor, laughing. "What was it, Theodora?"

"He said"—the words were uttered with but little compunction—"that you were not a girl on whom any man could bestow a strong affection. You were very well for an hour's amusement, but any man would be a fool who offered you anything more serious than a passing flirtation—something, at any rate, to that effect. Dear me," exclaimed Theodora, with a solo of laughter, "why do you look so horror-stricken over it? Others have made the same remark



before. It is your own fault that men think you vain and flippant; surely his opinion need not have turned you white to the very lips, need it? I told you for your own good."

"Don't be childish enough to undervalue what is told you for your own good," remarked the old lady, placidly. "Miss Trent, has Lady Lawrence acknowledged that photograph which was so beautifully taken at Abbotsmoor the day we were there?"

"Yes, and she admires it very much."

"She naturally would. When is she coming to England?"

"She will be here for Christmas, and we are to meet her in London."

"Has she a house in London, or was it old Myddelton's?"

"It is her own, I believe," said Theodora, the subject of conversation making even the speaker bearable—"a beautiful mansion in Kensington. I am glad we are to meet her there; I've been terribly afraid of her coming down here. It would have been awkward for her to have appointed to meet us in this neighbourhood."

"Yes," assented Mrs. Payte. "Stay, Honor, that was Selina's bell; I will go. Miss Trent, may I ask you to wait for a couple of minutes?"

Even if Theodora had been inclined to refuse, the little lady did not give her any opportunity; but she kept her scarcely more than the allotted time.

"I wish to goodness," she exclaimed, coming in with a heavy frown upon her face, "that servants were not, as a class, such heaps of selfishness. There is mine gone for her half-holiday, goodness only knows where, and Selina moaning for a new medicine from Kinbury, fidgeting me till I don't know what to do with myself. Servants have no right to ask for holidays."

"Our servants never have them, unless we are away," observed Theodora; "we think it a very unnecessary indulgence."

"It is an absurd indulgence!" fumed the old lady; "and see how it leaves me in this case—alone in the house with two helpless invalids, for that miserable girl belonging to the cottage is of less than no use at all. Now what am I

to do? I ought to go into Kinbury, but Selina is lost without me."

The faintest possible smile of contempt stirred Miss Trent's lips. Could any invalid be lost without this chattering and restless little worry? she thought. But she only said, aloud—"It is very awkward for you. Why is not the medicine sent?"

"She wishes for a bottle of a medicine she used to take. Sick women are so fanciful! She thinks a dose of *that* would give her a good night."

Honor looked up brightly at the words.

"I will go, Mrs. Payte," she said; "the little trouble will be well repaid by giving Mrs. Disbrowe a good night."

Miss Trent glanced at Honor with unconcealed surprise, but evidently considered the matter beneath argument.

"You must not go, Honor, because how could you come back?"

"Let me go," pleaded Honor, with the old bright self-forgetfulness. "I will come back with Lawrence in the waggonette."

"You are sure you can do so?"

"Quite sure," said the girl, knowing how pleased Lawrence would be to bring her home.

She would not go in to Mrs. Disbrowe, she said, for fear of the sick lady's begging her not to undertake the walk, and she only nodded a quiet good-bye to Theodora. Then she set out, singing softly to herself in the wide and unfrequented road, to drown the memory of those words which Theodora Trent had repeated to her.

"What difference does it make to me?" she said to herself at last, with a funny little shake of the head, when she found that the half-whispered song would not drown the words. "I don't care an atom."

She asserted that fact distinctly twice over; and yet a faint, tremulous pain seized the girl when Royden Keith, in sporting-dress, and with his gun upon his shoulder and his dogs around him, came through a gate before her, and out into the road.

"He—the sight of him made me feel very angry; I dislike him so!" she said, reasoning with herself in marvellous wisdom, as the tremor

passed and the flash of vivid colour faded. "I hope he will not wait for me—I do dislike him so!"

It was an unnecessary speech, because she could plainly see that Royden had not only waited, but was coming towards her. He had a smile of pleasure on his face when they met, but, before that, it had worn the sorrow of thorough disappointment. Every few days since his dog had saved the life of that child who lived in the solitary cottage among the green lanes, Royden had paid the mother a visit. But these visits—though his voice was good to hear, and his face good to see in her gloomy home, and though his thoughtful gifts were luxuries, and his tenderness to the little child was now the little fellow's one idea of happiness—brought a growing gloom instead of brightness to the mother's face. And this very day he had found the cottage locked and empty, though on his last visit no mention had been made of the probable departure.

Royden mused deeply over the circumstance, recalling how, on that last visit, he had once

again talked of Margaret Territ, and had noticed with what eager, petulant haste the mother had turned aside the subject, hurrying to say, as she had said before, that she had no neighbour Margaret—no neighbour at all—and that she wanted none. Yet on the day afterwards she had left, and had taken her child no one knew whither. How could Royden help musing upon this, and feeling that the one clue which he had for a moment held within his hand, was lost again? Still the smile broke in his eyes as Honor came—very lingeringly—up to meet him.

“Not going into Kinbury alone, are you, Miss Craven?” he asked, as his hand closed firmly over hers.

“Yes,” said Honor, and she told him simply why.

“But this should not be,” he objected, anxiously, as he made a sudden stop. “You cannot possibly walk back. Let me send the medicine out to East Cottage.”

“No, thank you,” returned Honor, proudly; “I will go because the commission was given to

me, and I can come home with my cousin. He has the waggonette in town."

Royden said no more. He could see how firm the girl's resolution was, and, if he could not also see how delighted she was with an excuse for displaying this pride, which was anything but natural to her, why, it was not very much to be wondered at, considering how little he knew of the private confidences of Miss Theodora Trent.

"I felt perfectly abashed when you began to talk to me of business in town, with that very business-like air, Miss Craven," he remarked, as they walked on, side by side, in spite of Honor's proud and ineffectual little efforts to leave a space of unoccupied highway between them. "Your tone conveyed an unmistakable rebuke to me; I began to feel overwhelmed with shame at being only 'on pleasure bent.'"

Honor, feeling the incumbrance of unfamiliarity in her new armour of pride, naturally made a strenuous effort to appear very much at her ease therein.

"Captain Trent considers shooting very hard work," she said, with her eyes far on before

her, and a general expression of entire ease and indifference. "I dislike him so," she added to herself again, most persistently, and trying to take into her face and figure an evidence of this.

"Then I ought to congratulate myself, I suppose," he said, with a smile, "that this will be for a time my last day's hard work. I am going away to-morrow."

Angrily and silently Honor framed the words in her own mind, "I am very glad—very glad indeed." But for all that, there passed a little quiver across her lips, and for an instant the steeples of Kinbury and the long stretch of white highway were wrapped in heavy mist. Then she spoke with quiet unconcern.

"You must be very glad. Yours is rather a solitary life here."

"Mine is always a solitary life."

By mistake—most mortifyingly by mistake—she looked up to meet his eyes.

"I hope not," she said; and that was by mistake too.

"It always has been," he answered, very low; "not quite idle, and not unhappy, but always

solitary. Within the last few months there has dawned upon me the possibility of its being different—a far-off possibility, but bright and beautiful beyond my dreams. This since I knew you, Honor.”

“He said you were not a girl on whom any man could bestow a strong affection.” Honor had no need to bring these words from her memory, to array them in giant strength against those quiet words he uttered; the smart was too recent. Her eyes looked clearly on before her still, and her lip curled scornfully; but the eyes did not venture to meet his, and the lip curled tremulously, as if its scorn were an effort.

“Miss Craven, I want to ask you if you will come and see my home. Mrs. Trent has offered to visit me, and to bring her daughter and her nephew. I had only to accept their kindness; but I would plead for yours. They are coming only for one day. Will you let me, for that one day, entertain in my home the only one in all the world who can make that home beautiful for me?”

“He said you were very well for an hour’s

amusement, but that any man would be a fool to offer you anything more serious than a passing flirtation."

Once more, with deathless force, the memory came and crushed the power of those earnest words he uttered. If only it had not been just in this hour that she had chanced to meet him!

"Thank you, Mr. Keith, but I think I will not come."

He stopped for a moment in his walk, looking down, with searching earnestness, into her face. It was such a pure and innocent face, so thoughtful as well as bright, so quick to read truth and earnestness, so thoroughly true itself, that he knew he could trust the answer he should read there.

"He said you were not a girl on whom any man could bestow a strong affection." Those words were in burning letters before her wide and angry eyes; at that moment he looked down and read his answer.

For many minutes after that they walked in silence; then, on the outskirts of the town, Royden offered his hand—

"It is good-bye, I suppose, Miss Craven. I

will not tease you by again asking you to come with Mrs. Trent; but, if you change your mind and come, you will make me very happy—for that one day at least.”

“You are very well for an hour’s amusement—that’s all.” With those words surging in her heart, Honor, answered very easily—

“Thank you again, Mr. Keith; but there is no likelihood of my changing my mind, so I will say good-bye.”

He raised his hat, and turned into a shop near which they had paused, his dogs following him, while Honor walked on slowly up the quiet street. The young woman in the small saddler’s shop never guessed how little the gentleman needed the dog-collar he bought. She knew him well by sight, and had often looked out admiringly upon him as he passed the window. He looked very handsome now, standing beside the counter, examining the collars in silence, and she was glad he took a long time to choose one. But her warm heart would hardly have been glad, could she have read aright the sorrow hidden at that moment under the heavy lashes of his eyes.

While he lingered here for Honor's sake, she walked on through the town, clinging childishly and eagerly to one thought—

“He said it; he did say it. Theodora told me so. It doesn't matter that they do not sound like his words. It doesn't matter that he does not look as if he would think them. He did say it. Theodora told me so.”

The two junior clerks, who both nourished for Honor, in good-natured rivalry, a harmless and romantic passion, sprang from their stools when they saw her enter Mr. Haughton's office, and volunteered, in a breath, to go themselves, when she told them, after her pleasant greeting, that she wanted a messenger sent with a note to a certain surgery.

“I will wait in Mr. Haughton's room,” she said, “for the answer.”

She had no sooner entered the lawyer's private office than Mr. Slimp followed her, with a bland apology for his master's absence—

“Mr. Haughton was summoned to a client who lives at least seven miles away, Miss Craven, and I know it is his intention to drive straight

home from there, without returning here again."

In vain did poor Honor try to hide her disappointment.

"I suppose there is a train this evening," she said, taking up a time-table with fingers that trembled with nervousness.

"The last train which stops at Statton, leaves at 4.30, Miss Craven," rejoined Bickerton Slimp, with great officiousness, as he wheeled round Mr. Haughton's armchair for her, "and it is now after five. How may I assist you?"

"Thank you, but you can be of no assistance whatever," said Honor, moving away from the offered chair.

"If I may take the liberty of suggesting that I walk back with you," proposed Bickerton, smiling.

"But you may not take the liberty," said Honor, with quiet unconcern.

"I fear, Miss Craven," smiled the little clerk, insinuatingly, as he rubbed his hands softly together, "that I must be rude enough to force my escort upon you. Mr. Haughton would

never forgive me, if I allowed you unprotected to——”

“Send over to the hotel, if you please,” interrupted Honor, “and order a fly for me.”

Her tone was quite gentle, and even betrayed a little of the timidity she felt, but there was in it a note of such unquestionable though quiet authority that Bickerton Slimp turned and left the room at once to obey her orders. Whereabout, on his way to the hotel, another resolution crossed his mind, he could not himself have told.

All through his absence Honor lingered at the window where she had taken her stand when Mr. Slimp had invited her to the fire, and some one opposite, whom, in her absent mood, she did not notice, saw her, and presently she was aware that the bustling figure of Mr. Haughton's chief clerk—well known to him—joined her at the window, evidently to tell her something which brought a startled fear into her face.

Prompt in all he did, Royden Keith walked downstairs and out into the hotel yard, from which he had watched Mr. Slimp emerge. A few steps brought him to where one of his

own grooms stood chatting with an ostler, and a few words explained his question.

"Mr. Slimp, sir," replied the ostler, touching his hat at every other word, "came over just to say he supposed we had no fly at home just now."

"And had you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you happen to know if Mr. Haughton is at his office?"

"He is not, sir. He drove away early to-day. I took the carriage round myself, and he said he should not be back."

Royden walked straight to Mr. Haughton's office, and upstairs with the junior clerk to Lawrence Haughton's private room.

"Miss Craven," he said, not noticing Mr. Slimp's discomfiture at his appearance, nor seeming to notice how she trembled and shrank back, as if afraid of *herself* now that he had appeared, "I came across to ask you if you will take a seat in my dog-cart. I am sending it"—with the refinement inherent in him, Royden ignored the proposal of going himself—"into Statton, and my man can give the medicine

in at East Cottage, and drive you on to The Larches. I am afraid they will be anxious at both places until you arrive, and so is it not a pity to linger here?"

"I was waiting for a fly," said Honor, her quiet voice faltering a little; "they are out at present, so I am watching for one to return."

"There is a fly in the hotel yard now, at your service, if you prefer it," said Royden, without a glance towards where Mr. Slimp stood, cowering a little in his miserable attempt at ease. "Do you prefer it?"

"Mr. Slimp told me—understood," said Honor, watching curiously the face of her guardian's clerk, "that they were engaged, and that I could not have one."

"Mr. Slimp told you so," returned Royden, with calm irony, "but did *not* understand so. You shall go as you choose, Miss Craven. Do you prefer a fly?"

"Yes, if you please," said Honor, a mist of tears gathering at last in her eyes; so like a child she felt just then, because she longed to let him decide for her and act for her, yet re-

belled against this longing with tearful petulance.

"Mr. Slimp," said Royden, "will go across again, and this time will bring you the cab."

Not very comfortable were the feelings of Mr. Bickerton Slimp as he left the office, his only relief being the discovery that Mr. Keith was following him.

By the time the fly was ready to leave the hotel yard, Honor was at the outer door of her guardian's offices, but her heart fell to see that it was Bickerton Slimp who stood beside the hired vehicle, waiting for her. Just as she had taken her seat, however, Mr. Keith came up.

"Is it so?" he asked, closing the door quietly in the clerk's very face, as he was on the point of entering; "is it so, Miss Craven, that you need no escort now?"

"None," she said, eagerly, as she saw what was the clerk's intention; "none, please."

"I think," he reflected, in his leisurely tones, "that it hardly seems worth while to send my carriage out, now that this is going; and so may I beg you to allow my man the seat on the

box here? He shall be no hindrance to you—a little help, perhaps, in guiding and arranging with the driver.”

“Thank you,” said Honor, quick to read all kind and generous motives.

“He is here now, and will be much obliged for the seat,” observed Royden, as he stepped back from the closed door and raised his hat. Then, with great relief, Honor watched Royden’s valet mount the box before her.

“Stop nowhere on your way, Pierce, even for a minute.”

“No, sir.”

The fly drove on, and Royden turned away, with just one glance of coolest scorn, not unmixed with amusement, at the baffled little clerk. It was a look which recalled to Bickerton Slimp that (to him) unpleasant evening at the Myddelton Arms, when, after his severe castigation, he had been so coolly followed by the quizzical amusement of those long gray eyes.

“I haven’t forgotten,” muttered Bickerton, clenching his fists, as he mounted the office stairs again; “and this will make me doubly

remember. I shall be more than even with him yet—more than even.”

The threat was heavy and portentous, so it was small wonder that the wiry little form shook under it.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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